



## REVIEWS

Hickel, Jason. 2018. *The Divide: Global Inequality from Conquest to Free Markets*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. 344 pp.

Jason Hickel, an anthropologist, in his book *The Divide: Global Inequality from Conquest to Free Markets*, focuses on postdevelopment and the global political economy. Native to Swaziland, Hickel uses critical analyses from his personal experiences with the development sector to explain the historical origins of poverty, and failures of the economic system. The author's positionality as a racialized Western-educated individual (from the London School of Economics) holding extensive experience in development work offers a unique perspective to explaining uneven global development. The book emphasizes how progress, in face of the fight against poverty, remains a façade as global leaders continue to market the "good-news" narrative of development without actualizing tangible socioeconomic change for the Global South. *The Divide* explains that through philanthropic disguise, this development narrative enables the oligarchy of powerful actors including government officials, corporations, and international financial institutions to work in tandem to continue socially, environmentally, and economically oppressing the Global South through a hidden agenda of Western-centric capitalistic growth. This book discusses the historically dominant paradigms of Western colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism that have manifested the socioeconomic conditions of the so-called developing world.

The book's nine chapters are sectioned into four parts. The first three parts, "The Divide," "Concerning Violence," and the "New Colonialism," provide a timeline for explaining the evolution of the flaws in our global economic order. The last section, "Closing the Divide," focuses on recommended solutions.

“The Divide” presents a historical analysis of the good-news narrative of development. Hickel describes the inception of this ideology stemming from a public relations gimmick by the 33rd President of the United States, Harry Truman. Specifically, the good-news narrative was born through his 1949 inaugural speech, which invoked nationalism and hope in the American people through a compelling narrative of foreign aid provision to the Third World. The book continues to analyze the proclaimed successes and inherent failures within the Millennium Development Goals, specifically those in which statistics are manipulated in light of political interests. “Concerning Violence” gives a historical review of how developed states created the conditions of the Third World, defining draconian episodes surrounding war, conflict, and violence as characteristics of the West’s development success story. Hickel describes how the wealth of the developed comes at the cost of plundering underdeveloped nations for the raw materials that allow their power to persist. This section continues to explain the Western neocolonial implementation of market fundamentalism amongst the underdeveloped world. Hickel draws our attention to the resistance of developing nations to neoliberalism and the resulting impacts of rampant political corruption. US intervention, coups, assassinations and the installation of military juntas and puppet authoritarian dictators led to the replacement of developmentalist movements with free market regimes that served the commercial interests of the West.

“The New Colonialism,” Hickel describes how neocolonialism emerged alongside the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization. The author explains that during the post-liberalization era following colonialism, the economic exploitation and political control exercised by Western powers are dressed up as debt, tax evasion, patent monopolies, structural adjustment programs (SAPs), institutional legal immunity, and oligarchies within multilateral trade agreements. The concluding section, “Closing the Divide,” introduces a strategy for global economic restructuring that will allow for global equity to be achievable. Amongst Hickel’s progressive political economy recommendations are: debt cancellation among underdeveloped nations; democratization and equal representation within global governance systems; the implementation of fair international trade systems that allow sovereign developing countries to create policies in their own interests; a global minimum wage; and, the protection of public resources and the commons.

Furthermore, Hickel describes how the good-news narrative explains the development divide as solvable through the installation of the right institutions and policies. As mentioned in the book, theorists such as Rostow (1959) illustrate development as countries experiencing different stages in their linear lives. This argument fails to take into consideration that these socioeconomic disparities lie beyond the nations' borders, with underdevelopment a result of Global North vs. Global South asymmetric power dynamics that have organized an inequitable global economy. The book's common theme refers to parasitic relationships, where development for some results in underdevelopment for others—poverty for profit. However, through the dominance of the good-news narrative, statistical manipulation, and underestimation of poverty conditions, Global North actors have been able to dismiss the idea of the rich impoverishing the poor to the general public.

His recommendations aside, the most significant contribution of the book is Hickel's foundational explanation of capitalism through primitive accumulation and colonization—a product of genocides, slavery, displacement, and extirpation. His arguments align with critical development literature that describe imperialism and the exploitation of the periphery by the core as fundamental within the process of industrializing capitalist systems (Williams 1944; Davis 2008; Hoogvelt 1997). The book defines development as directly associated with economic growth in that the foundation of orthodox economics disregards anything that cannot be commodified for economic profit. As a consequence, capitalism has been molded alongside ecological and social unsustainability, with the degradation of ecosystem services and traditional values in exchange for the Western social construct of economic prosperity.

Hickel effectively described the era where newly sovereign nations adopted Western-Keynesian economic frameworks, using state-led development and nationalization to improve the socioeconomic indicators in the region. Meanwhile, powerful actors in the Global North resisted against developing nations' new wealth distribution. Global North actors viewed national industrialization for developing nations as reaping the West's economic gains and investments in the South's raw materials. Hickel delves into the idea of Keynesianism, explaining how state intervention was demonized by the West and was replaced with the glorification of neoliberalism. Neoliberalism was marketed by the developed world as the ultimate guide to individual liberty and economic prosperity, even if development literature and

empirical evidence say otherwise (Singer 2008; Sneyd 2015). Once the periphery acknowledged the backwardness of neoliberalism, the core used dictatorship and fearmongering to manifest complacency against dissent. As someone who has done research on and participated in development work in the Philippines, I agree with this line of reasoning given the extensive examples of violent power asymmetries between the Global North and the Global South that the author provides, illustrating varying legislative instruments and military force that have been used to ensure that the Global North maintains influence and power over the domestic regulatory affairs of developing nations.

Particularly notorious, Hickel highlights SAPs for their exorbitant compound interest rates on loans that followed the surrendering of national economic policymaking from state governments to Washington technocrats and bankers. Again, as someone familiar with the consequences of these SAPs in debt-ridden developing countries, I agree with Hickel in terms of the hypocrisy of the International Monetary Fund's mission statement of reducing global poverty, as SAPs have led to forceful national social spending to go towards debt repayments rather than poverty alleviation and development. Hickel identifies how free market economies are inefficient for the majority in relation to the Prebisch-Singer hypothesis and lack of state intervention. He distinguishes how primary commodity-based economies deteriorate as the price of raw materials decreases relative to the price of manufactured goods. Challenging market fundamentalism, the book describes how every developed nation has grown through state-led protectionist measures, using China and East Asia as examples, which interestingly were the only regions where SAPs were not implemented. Critical work by Rodrik (2008) reinforces Hickel's main arguments when stating that China experienced rapid economic growth and poverty reduction through unconventional policies such as trade protection and nationalization. Moreover, critical literature in this field by Heilbroner (1970) strengthens these arguments through his analysis of the contradictions within neoliberalism with respect to capitalism's growing government presence focused on coercion and the emergence of science and technology as public controls.

From here, Hickel claims that at the heart of the global capitalist structure is ecological dependency. The climate crisis stands at the forefront of today's issues, with developing states being the most vulnerable to the repercussions of climate change despite their relatively low contribution to global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. As

nations strive for modernization, nonrenewable resources are increasingly exploited, resulting in spillover effects related to rising GHG emissions and exacerbated impacts of climate change such as rising sea levels, food scarcity, and increasing severity of natural disasters. These statements align with Dauvergne's (2010) work, which exposes the global system of unsustainable production and shadow effects of consumption, with inefficiencies related to social and environmental costs not being captured in the market. Hickel identifies the global economic transformations necessary to combat global inequality through policies that adhere to debt resistance, global democracy, fair trade, just wages, and protecting the commons. I believe that the radical socioeconomic and political transformations and global reforms described are necessary and paramount to combatting interrelated issues of climate change and societally embedded capitalistic consumption.

Though Hickel's work presents a brief overview of decades' worth of development history origins and contributions, it failed to provide an analysis of a crucial component—gender and development. Although intersectionality was not mentioned within the initial objectives or preliminary pages of the book, I believe it remains critical to understanding uneven global development. This book is limited in its ability to provide an intersectional lens on the inequities of development. Specifically, it is deficient in examining the systemic failures that have perpetrated individual experiences of oppression related to class, race, gender, sex, ethnicity, amongst other social locations. Another limitation to Hickel's work is his take on global progressive leftist recommendations. Although it is evidently clear that systematic change is imperative for poverty alleviation, his call for action on global restructuring may seem radical and utopian to many, especially alongside the rise of authoritarian populism evident in today's global society. Specifically, implementing global reform related to democracy and a worldwide living wage can be seen as unrealistic solutions to uneven development. Due to a lack of global congruence on political stances within nations on this manner, the divisive ideologies which make implementing such policies on the global level can be recognized as nearly impossible. Providing a section focusing on guidelines for compliance to the restructuring of international policy could enhance credibility and ease resistance against these reforms.

In addition, and in the face of the contentious debates Hickel puts forth throughout the book, a greater effort to engage relevant development literature could have reinforced his main arguments. In

the early pages of the book, Hickel points out that the global economic system perpetuates poverty and relinquishes the ability for meaningful development to persist. The international systems of patents, trade, and debt that provide philanthropists the capital to provide aid, according to Hickel, are the very ones that plunge the developing world into impoverishment. These statements can be strengthened by works such as Rodney (1972) that focus on dual societies and underdevelopment as a result of exploitation and capitalist systems rather than implicit beliefs related to the Third World's archaic institutions and capital shortage. The book states that development aid lacks the capacity to provide reparations for the injustices the Global South have incurred in relation to colonization, debt, and slavery, amongst other variables of inequity. Hickel's arguments could also be strengthened by Escobar (2008), specifically his examination of development discourse as a tool to exercise power over the Global South. Escobar (1995) identified that through the creation of a universally understood homogenized representation of the poor, the West used this discourse to commodify poverty and dominate the social, environmental, and economic aspects of the Third World. If nothing else, referencing such works would further underscore how persistent the problems described by Hickel have been.

Overall, *The Divide* remains highly readable, with its intended audience targeting both academics and nonexperts. Despite its flaws, the book helps increase public awareness of global inequities, helping explain how development aid is a neoliberal façade that allows the rich to profit from poverty. This profiteering occurs while painting the benevolent story that they have been fixing the issues they have caused through charity. This book unveils global consciousness to historical injustices and provides recommendations to combat inequality through global democracy, political action, and mobilization. Future research building upon books such as this can focus on revitalizing the economic order through intersectional development, destabilizing Western imperialism, and proactive strategies to global systemic change and wealth redistribution.—ANGELA ASUNCION, *TECHNICAL CONSULTANT, BANTAY KITA*.

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**Wright, Sarah, and Ma. Diosa Labiste. 2018. *Stories of Struggle: Experiences of Land Reform in Negros Island, Philippines*. Quezon City, Philippines: University of the Philippines Press. ix, 165 pp.**

On a tragic night in November 2018, human rights lawyer Benjamin Ramos was attacked and killed by "riding-in-tandem"<sup>1</sup> assailants in a Southern Negros city (Espina 2018). Ramos was the secretary-general of the National Union of Peoples' Lawyers–Negros Island and a long-time volunteer worker at the Paghidaet sa Kauswagan<sup>2</sup> Development Group (PDG), a nonprofit organization formed in 1987 that has worked with local farmers in Southern Negros. PDG was the main local partner of authors Sarah Wright and Ma. Diosa Labiste for the book *Stories of Struggle: Experiences of Land Reform in Negros Island, Philippines*. Ramos was a key contact. The book's dedication page was devoted to

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1. Riding-in-tandem in the Philippine context refers to "two persons riding in a motorcycle who commit crime, usually robbery and paid kill" (Viray 2014).

2. Paghidaet sa Kauswagan is Hiligaynon for "Peace in Development."