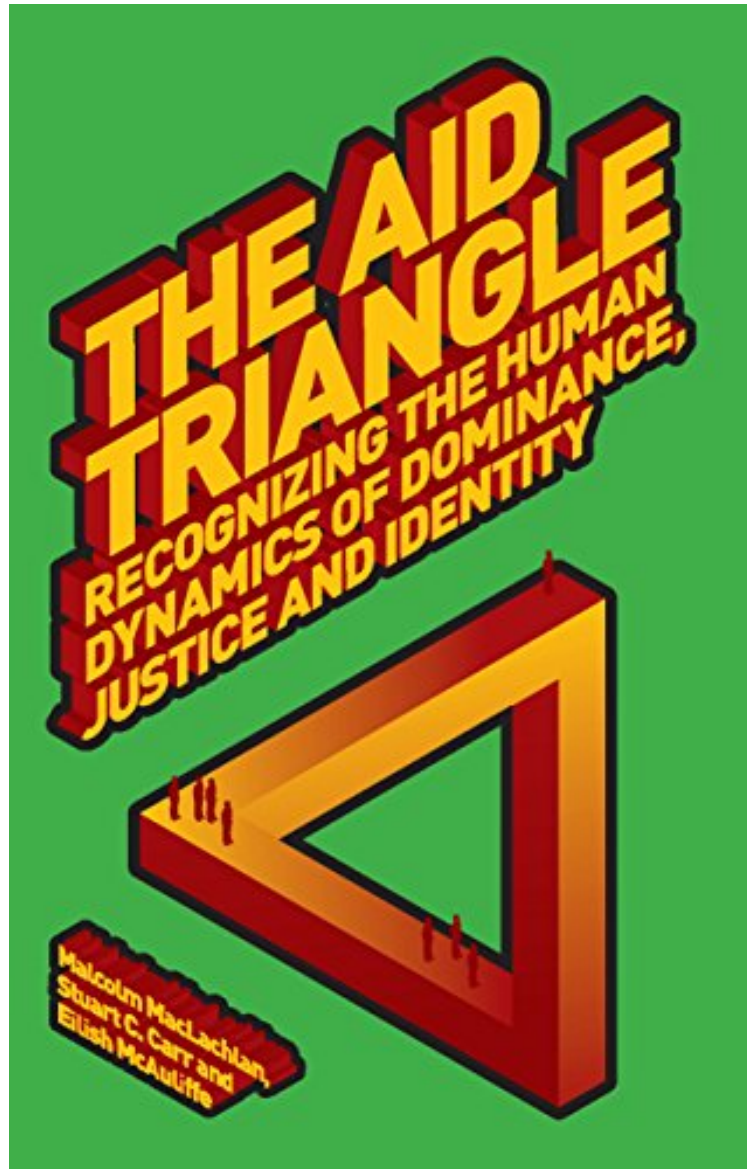


[Library ebook] The Aid Triangle: Recognizing the Human Dynamics of Dominance, Justice and Identity (Palgrave Development Studies Series)

The Aid Triangle: Recognizing the Human Dynamics of Dominance, Justice and Identity (Palgrave Development Studies Series)

Malcolm MacLachlan, Stuart Carr, Eilish McAuliffe
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Malcolm MacLachlan, Stuart Carr, Eilish McAuliffe : The Aid Triangle: Recognizing the Human Dynamics of Dominance, Justice and Identity (Palgrave Development Studies Series) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Aid Triangle: Recognizing the Human Dynamics of

Dominance, Justice and Identity (Palgrave Development Studies Series):

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Justice in Development Theory and Practice By The.PhDJ Given the recent UN summit convened to review the 2015 Millennium Development Goals, the diagnoses offered by MacLachlan, Carr, and McAuliffe in their compact book, *The Aid Triangle: Recognizing the Human Dynamics of Dominance, Justice, and Identity*, are particularly timely. Before the worldwide recession--indeed, before the formalization of the goals themselves--the very concept of international humanitarian aid had already been called into question in the face of increasing global inequality, both within and between countries, and despite a half-century of Western "help" and decades of economic growth (MacLachlan et al., 2010). Of course, before they were helping the global South, Westerners were helping themselves through colonial exploitation. MacLachlan et al. effectively describe the persistence of power relationships behind global capitalism's rhetoric of mutual benefit--in the debt slavery perpetuated by the IMF and World Bank, but equally in the jockeying of nonprofits acting strangely like corporations. Exposing the persistence of past injustices and their unintended consequences in the very setting invented to redress these grievances is undoubtedly the book's greatest draw. *The Aid Triangle* recapitulates several ideas from the authors' 1998 contribution, *Psychology of Aid*, which they billed as "a modest attempt to raise consciousness about the value of a psychological perspective" in development literature by focusing on what they called "the human factor" (Carr et al., 1998, p. 2). In this latest work, the same collective inter-subjectivity that characterizes international aid is framed in terms of the three, interrelated concepts in the subtitle--dominance, justice, and identity--which MacLachlan et al. claim, 12 years on, are still woefully absent from most reviews of aid effectiveness. At the heart of *The Aid Triangle* is a fourth concept--learning. In their view, it is the lack of a "systems-based approach"--one that appreciates the reciprocal relationships between individual and group actors--that explains perhaps the biggest irony in development work: how it is that we consistently fail to learn from our experience. Addressing this "Fool me twice, shame on me" chagrin in the field is the impetus for the book and potentially, its biggest contribution. However, its audience need not be limited to perplexed practitioners of aid-work but will be of interest to sociologists and political theorists as well--indeed, to anyone whose brow has been furrowed by the complexities of the "identity/recognition" debate (see Taylor et al., 1994) that is our inheritance as members of multicultural societies and a burgeoning international community. MacLachlan et al. strike an admirable balance between focusing on the importance of language and not letting jargon impede meaning; in the first two chapters, the ideas of "aid" and "development" are themselves called into question. Too often, the assumption in the West (itself a misleading metonym for the "developed" world) is that "development" is a stand-in for psychological, social, and cultural development--which in turn are a metonym for the antiquated imperial term "civilization." The prevailing assumption, then, is that the industrial or technological part of development (represented by GDP growth) signals the presence of the whole of human development--something that has been achieved in "developed" nations and is an immanent, if slow, process in the other nations. Psychologists ought to be attuned to a second, related, and more pernicious assumption facilitated by the elision of national development into "human," or "cognitive" development. One need only consider the two meanings of "underdeveloped" in these contexts to appreciate the authors' warning that an implicit sense of superiority or entitlement can easily creep into discussions about the plight of the world's poorest, even when the conversation ostensibly has nothing to do with intellectual sophistication or general ability. What's worse, underestimation of capacity can act as a self-fulfilling prophecy. The authors' point here, as it was in the *Psychology of Aid*, is that the difference between a real and perceived sense of superiority is semantic. Conscious or unconscious, suspicions from either side that economic inequalities hide some more basic difference can short-circuit even good-faith attempts at amending it. Put in terms of their heuristic triad, "The sense of implicit social dominance in international aid taints people's expectations of what is just and fair, which is quite ironic, given that aid is often directed at redressing situations of injustice, inequality, and oppression. When an individual's or a group's sense of justice is threatened, so is the basis on which they derive these values: their identity" (p. 12). The diagnosis of a pathological obsession with economic growth at the expense of more meaningful rubrics of human development is, sadly, common enough. It is for connecting these familiar tropes of social dominance with the dialectics of identity and recognition that the book could earn high marks for relevance, not just across the social sciences, but in the humanities, which also have a stake in the realization of substantive human rights. This appeal is not merely a matter of strategic marketing; the humanities, specifically, ethics, is precisely the realm where the meaning of abstractions such as "moral truths" and "dignity" are negotiated and are, therefore, the base upon which the third side of *The Aid Triangle*, global justice, rises or falls. In their emphatic embrace of perspectivism, the authors frequently fall into a deconstructionist/critical Marxist camp; however, in trying to strike a balance between identity and recognition, they may have found a collaborative understanding of justice a better foundation than dominance. These are notoriously murky post-modern waters, as the authors acknowledged when they dipped their toes into the literature with *The Psychology of Aid* during the politically correct 1990s; these, however, are waters *The Aid Triangle* would have to cross if it were to represent real progress from diagnosis to cure. The authors' focus on what they call "triple loop learning"--"thinking `about the box' [versus just outside it], examining core values and rethinking the fundamental

purpose and principles" (MacLachlan et al., 2010, p. 122)--takes a page out of organizational learning theory to effect this progress. As psychologists such as George Lakoff and anthropologists such as Gregory Bateson have hypothesized, such reflexive modes of thinking can be key to facilitating communication and building consensus amidst radical difference. MacLachlan et al. rightly decry the rigidity inherent in applying unidirectional thinking to an inherently reflexive phenomenon as the chief deficiency of the international aid regime: its failure to reflect in policy and practice the partnership demanded by true interdependence or to rebel against the artificial carving up of the world into geopolitical Thirds, hemispheric quarters or halves, or national two-hundredths, thereby undermining our shared environmental and security challenges. However, the authors also seem to condone that same system's attempts to give developing nations their due by allowing them to make the same mistakes they did as exploitative imperial adolescents, maintaining an unhelpful parental posture that ironically harms future generations (note, for example, China's arguments for the independence of economic development from international policy constraints, their own environmental recklessness, and the deteriorating working conditions domestically and in their African client states). MacLachlan et al. address a second sort of pseudo-recognition with grievous economic implications, the "realities" of the donor-driven aid model. As field veterans, they are hardly naïve regarding the motive power of moneyed interests, philanthropic and otherwise, over NGOs and their complicity in driving the latter's obsession with documentation and public profile by which their mission can be diluted. Nor are the authors unaware of the potential pitfalls of bypassing aid organizations in favor of governments, even the nascent or ill-formed (although they do seem to think such bypassing is the lesser of the two evils because of its empowering potential). It's not that the authors are overly cynical about either route; the problem is that their eminently even-handed cost-benefit analysis of donor-recipient relations sidesteps a succinct summary of how this nest of issues relates to another central issue--inclusive development. Are we under a special ethical obligation to the most destitute that justifies the cost of shelving large-scale, technocratic operations in favor of ones targeting the vulnerable--the young, old, women, disabled, and those already afflicted with disease? The large interdisciplinary scope of this small book means that some readers might feel that moral philosophic questions such as this one get short shrift. Carr's answers from the field of organizational behavior and industrial psychology, appearing in the concluding chapters of the book, may unintentionally privilege the market rubric of efficiency, given their origin. This prioritization, and the prescriptions that flow from it, can displace other values, such as sustainability, that are its necessary compliments, at least if humanitarian work is to remain humane. The authors are aware of all this but perhaps not outspoken enough in citing the dangers of "learning from the system" when the system is so spectacularly flawed. In its deference, the book is ultimately prescriptively equivocal; one almost wishes it had an even longer subtitle that included, "...And What to do About it." Unfortunately, assessment of the relative risks and rewards of each path is occurring at a time when we have neither the luxury to defer nor the latitude to get it wrong. The Aid Triangle, in addition to being a handy heuristic for understanding how the politics of international aid helped create our current plight, may also represent a sort of sword of Damocles hanging over us, reinforcing the weightiness of our current "choice" between urgency and sustainability.

The Aid Triangle focuses on the human dynamics of international aid and illustrates how the aid system incorporates power relationships, and therefore relationships of dominance. Using the concept of a triangle of dominance, justice and identity, this timely work explains how the experience of injustice is both a challenge and a stimulus to personal, community and national identity, and how such identities underlie the human potential that international aid should seek to enrich. This insightful new critique provides for the reader an innovative and constructive framework for producing more empowering and more effective aid.

'This book is a most welcome addition to the growing call to rethink this whole dimension of international relations.' John Berry, Queen's University in Canada. 'This approachable and imaginative book takes a very different look at the practice of International Aid. Written by social scientists with considerable experience in the area, it offers not only a critique of current practices but also advice about how really to help those who need it. It is written with passion and clarity but always supported by the scientific literature in the area.' Professor Adrian Furnham, University College London 'At last! A book that addresses the psychological politics braided through civil society, governmental and multilateral agencies involved in aid. I highly recommend it.' A.K. Dube, African Decade for Persons with Disability 'A thought-provoking book that poses key questions about the nature and mechanisms of development.' Alastair Ager, Columbia University 'This book places justice - between individuals, between organisations and between countries and international organisations - at the heart of international aid and development; explaining its relationship with dominance and identity in a challenging, authoritative and engaging way.' Mary Robinson, Realizing Rights: The Ethical Globalization Initiative About the Author Malcolm MacLachlan is with the Centre for Global Health and the School of Psychology at Trinity College Dublin. He is a graduate of the universities of Cardiff, Dundee, London, Strathclyde and Dublin and is currently a Visiting Professor at the Centre for Rehabilitation Studies, Stellenbosch University. His research interests are in organisational aspects of international aid, enablement of people with disabilities, and the interplay between culture and health. He has worked with a broad range of NGOs and multi-

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