

Afrika-Kolloquium

Vortragsreihe des Instituts für Afrikawissenschaften im Rahmen der Internationalen Arbeitstagung „Akteure der Entwicklungspolitik“. 11.-12.11.2015, Universität Wien

FWF Projekt: Experts in “Development” and “Socialist Aid” in the era of global competition between the political systems “West” and “East”.

Writing the History of Development: Longer, Deeper, Wider

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The rise of neoliberalism and the end of the Cold War ushered in a prolonged crisis of “development” as applied to the peoples of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Faced with impasse, historians and other social scientists set out on a novel journey to examine development as history. They proposed using history as the methodology for understanding development, rather than constructing development theories to explain history and model the future. During the “first wave” of writing the history of development in the 1990s, much of the scholarship centred on the importance of discourse, particularly high policy statements, theories and ideologies. The concern with discourse shaped the field in crucial ways: researchers fixed their attention on conceptual or intellectual frameworks, and perceived development from a Western and elitist perspective. Consequently, development’s totalizing claims and undifferentiated impact were accepted largely at face value. The limitations of this type of approach had become manifest by the end of the decade. The events of September 11, 2001, set the stage for the next phase in the historiography of development. Since 9/11, scholars have moved beyond the binary and homogenous depictions that marked the “first wave” of historical writing, offering instead more contextualized, complex and ambiguous narratives of development’s past. The Cold War timeframe has been jettisoned in favor of the *longue durée*, pivoting more to the earlier origins and colonial precedents of the postwar project. The earlier importance of metropolitan-centered ideas and discursive frameworks has been replaced by concern for actual development practices and impacts on the people who inhabit the territories of the global south. The most significant realignment, and one that has only just begun, is towards conceptualizing development as a global and transnational enterprise, one that encompassed more than the American and Western European experiences and included a diversity of historical actors and trajectories.

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