

BOOK REVIEW

Foreign Aid and the Future of Africa (Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018)

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Foreign Aid and the Future of Africa

Kenneth KALU

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Foreign aid literature is quite vast. Some scholars work on why donors give foreign aid, others dwell on the outcomes of foreign aid. While, from a realistic perspective, foreign aid is seen as a political tool, from a liberal perspective, foreign aid is a must for a developing country's economic and political progress. From a structuralist perspective though, foreign aid is a new way to colonize the underdeveloped world. Kenneth Kalu's *Foreign Aid and the Future of Africa* is about the outcomes of foreign aid, and mostly with negative connotations.

In the book, the author dwells on why foreign assistance does not work. Apart from other works, apparently as he claims, he gives some concrete solution to Africa's poverty; and he is very critical of the foreign aid regime of the traditional donors. The main argument of the book is that although foreign aid helps a lot in softening some aspects of harsh poverty in Africa, it does not have the capacity to eradicate poverty altogether. Even though foreign aid has been very concentrated in Africa, there has not been any meaningful development in the lives of ordinary citizens.

Kalu's main point to support his argument is that foreign aid, and capital inflow might be very much connected to the good will of the developed countries. However, he suggests poverty in Africa is a reality not because of a lack of financial resources, rather, financial resources are a consequence of poverty itself. Hence, if the absence of financial resources is not the cause of poverty, for example, in a lot of Sub-Saharan African countries, what is the reason for this extreme poverty status in Africa? These countries are the main concern for Kalu, and they are mineral rich countries. According to Kalu, it is about the African state institutions which were not built for the welfare of their citizens, but they were built, mostly in colonial times, in order to benefit only a few political and social elites. Hence, to target poverty and achieve true development, restructuring and transformation of African states into developmental states are the key.

According to the author, post-colonial state structure is inherited from the colonial times, and the unique position of the African countries are very much bound to today's political economic conundrum. Kalu underlines, in Africa, there existed no states in a modern Eurocentric sense and so colo-

nialists had to establish new institutions. Although modern is used in the Westphalian sense, the principal aim of the colonialists was to exploit and expropriate the vast richness of the African continent. Hence, the early state structures of the 19th century Africa were built in order to oppress the masses and serve the interests of the colonial masters. At the end of the day, any African state which was established with those aims was mostly an artificial creation, while the citizens were mostly from different backgrounds, nationalities and so on.

Decolonization of Africa, according to Kalu, was welcomed by two superpowers, the Soviets and the Americans, who had an antipathy towards imperialism. There existed a current of self-determination in international relations; and economic stagnation did also affect the decision on the decolonization process in Africa. Although colonialism was headed to collapse in the 1950s, European powers, which were interested in securing their economic and political benefits, did not try to form a state structure to enhance economic and political well-being of ordinary African citizens, and did not create self-sustaining countries. Commodity exporting status of the economy was the reason for the economic dependence of Africans on the ex-colonialist metropolis; and the overdependence on export-led cash crops led to a decline in farming, which sustained societies in the pre-colonialist era. The fall in commodity prices in the international market led to economic devastation for the African states. Poverty and hunger were followed by social unrest and military coups. From 1965 to 1969, 21 military coups took place in Africa. Although military rules were the hopes for a better governance, they failed to overcome obstacles of corruption and bad governance. The 1980's were tagged as a lost decade in Africa, while in the 1990's, democratization current in the world affected the continent and most African states held democratic elections. However, authoritarian presidents, patron-client networks either in government or opposition political parties did not allow the transformation of the political institutions. Kalu underlines Patrick Chabal and Jean-Pascal Daloz's claim about the political alignment of the bureaucrats and elites to their kins and clients rather than to the whole nation.

Kalu's main reasonings are about the colonial past, exploitative nature of colonial times and today. His main objective is to restructure the political and economic institutions in a way that are inclusive. He claims it is not logical to expect miracles from the same institutions which were put there to exploit the Africans. Although he claims to refrain from blaming anyone, readers can easily see Kalu points out colonialist Europe, modern time dictators, and ineffective foreign intervention as the main causes of poverty in Africa. Last of all, foreign aid, under current circumstances and institutional map does not have any capacity to eradicate poverty in the continent.

Apart from technical issues on economic growth, the book is also intriguing for scholars who are interested in the roots of poverty in Africa. Although Kalu does not want to blame any factors or actors, colonialist Europe has come across as the main suspect. The intense slavery and colonialism seem to have effects on the political economy of today's Africa. In the pre-colonialist times, there happened to be some kind of institutions which shaped the evolution of African society in a particular way. Be that as it may, contrary to ideas on society and institutions inclusively shaping each other, Kalu seems to overvalue the institutions' power on the evolution of the society. On the one hand, he advocates the significance of African traditions, like respect for authority; on the other hand, he claims that the colonialist state also developed relationships between the state and the African people. Therefore, it is only logical to assume, from Kalu's point of view, that Africans' cultures and traditions, which only facilitated the colonial and post-colonial rule, are intact, while the other traditions, African pre-colonial

relations between people and authority, which would oppose exploitative state, are not determinant in this case. Hence, the author becomes selective while explaining reasons for African poverty.

Furthermore, Kalu gives some examples for successful Africans abroad. He tries to point out that it is not Africans' fault to be poor but that of the extractive institutions, which were mainly established under colonialism. According to Kalu's claim, there are few successful and rich Africans in the world. However, this is not scientifically appropriate as evidence, unless we have a rigid statistic about all Africans. Concept of richness or success are relative; and it is tricky to respond in a rigorous way. There needs to be a systematic analysis supported by evidence to comment on successful and rich Africans. In addition to that, some African states like Botswana and Malawi seem to be more successful in achieving economic growth. Kalu seems to be interested in Sub-Saharan African countries and their extreme poverty; but what about South Africa? Is it an outlier? If South African institutions are inclusive, didn't they experience colonial rule as well, or did not have the same patrimonialism and patron-client networks as the other unsuccessful cases in Africa? Hence, there are some overgeneralizations in Kalu's work on Sub-Saharan Africa. All in all, Kenneth Kalu seems to brilliantly put the means and ends of poverty in Africa, albeit some issues require more evidence-based analysis. It is a book that is easy to read, which would also interest readers in the subject.