South African Journal of Philosophy

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rsph20

Africa, the global order and the politics of aid

Chika C. Mba

To cite this article: Chika C. Mba (2022) Africa, the global order and the politics of aid, South African Journal of Philosophy, 41:1, 103-115, DOI: 10.1080/02580136.2022.2055264

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/02580136.2022.2055264

Published online: 06 Apr 2022.

South African Journal of Philosophy 2022, 41(1): 103–115
Printed in South Africa — All rights reserved

SOUTH AFRICAN JOURNAL
OF PHILOSOPHY
ISSN 0258-0136 EISSN 2073-4867
https://doi.org/10.1080/02580136.2022.2055264

Africa, the global order and the politics of aid

Chika C. Mba
Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Accra, Ghana
cmba@ug.edu.gh

A strong, but underexplored linkage exists between the current global order, world poverty and the politics of aid. Exploring this linkage, which is the key concern of this article, is crucial for a fuller understanding of the symbiotic injustice of the global order and the politics of aid. Using a conceptual thought experiment that portrays the framework of post-war global order as an intrinsically unjust "Global Games Arena", I attempt a "vivisection" of the problematic relationship between the global order and the politics of aid. In the real world, I follow decolonial scholars like Adom Getachew and Olúfẹmi O. Táíwò to argue that the modern and current global order and its social, economic and political structures are founded on the unfair gains of trans-Atlantic slavery and colonialism. The empirical and analytical consequence of this situation, the article shows, is that to make aid effective or altogether end its penurious impact in Africa in particular, would require, at first, a jettisoning or remaking of the current international order. In other words, I argue that aid would not be necessary in the absence of a world order that in fact requires aid to maintain a system of global injustice and inequality.

Introduction

There is a strong but underexplored linkage between the current global order, world poverty and the politics of aid. The main focus of this article is in exploring this linkage, crucial for a better understanding of the symbiotic injustice of the global order and the politics of aid. However, it should be noted at the outset that it has become almost commonplace among experts, especially in the last two decades, to increasingly admit, correctly, that international aid has become, in many ways, a mechanism for exploitation and political control, contributing significantly to destabilising local economies in certain regions of the world, blocking off opportunities and incentives for growth in those regions and ultimately worsening world poverty (Ferguson 1994; Easterly 2001; 2006; Griffiths 2003; Perkins 2004; 2016; Chakravarti 2005; Calderisi 2006; Riddell 2007; Bolton 2008; Collier 2007; Shirley 2008; Moyo 2009; Deaton 2013; Kalu 2018).[1] A phenomenon some left-leaning intellectuals more recently refer to as *Karma colonialism* (Alyson 2020), insofar as these instabilities occur in previously colonised societies, with African countries being the worst hit in this regard.

Conversely, critics arrive at very different conclusions as to what should become of aid in the last analysis. Jeffrey Sachs (2005; 2006) argues that aid has not worked because either not enough of it is given or aid is politicised and that the solution is that aid be substantially increased and depoliticised. While not completely disavowing Sachs' substantial increment argument, William Easterly (2006) argues for a substantially revised strategy for aid, while Calderisi, Dambisa Moyo and Angus Deaton would rather have a world without aid, in the light of the debilities aid or its politics have brought to developing countries' economies, especially in Africa. I imagine that the trio would welcome aid

1 My summation, broken into separate components, is not true of each of the scholars cited; but each of them is persuaded that aid has failed as an integral aspect of post-war development policy for various reasons. My argument, however, is that none of them has come to the realisation that the global order birthed the regime of aid and requires aid to remain in place.

without its politics, but as this article shows, international aid is inseparable from the world system and its politics.[2] Kenneth Kalu, Paul Collier and Giles Bolton generally share Sachs' misgivings about the misdirection, paucity and politics of aid, while suggesting alternative approaches to revising the current aid strategy. Kalu (2018) blames the failure of aid in Africa on the structure of the postcolonial African state, which he variously describes as oligarchic, non-developmental and predatory. African states, Kalu claims, are replete with corrupt, extractive institutions that routinely block ideas and policies that could translate into the well-being of the people, while serving the selfish interest of the elite. Curiously, Kalu held that restructuring African states requires "external assistance", and foreign aid should more appropriately focus on restructuring and transforming African states into agents of development (Kalu 2018, viii). Similarly, Bolton witnessed first-hand why and how aid fails in Africa, but in his book, *Aid and Other Dirty Business* (2008), he proposed that foreign aid itself be restructured and depoliticised to target the poorest persons.

In line with the above flow of thought, Calderisi takes a naïve cultural-essentialist approach, blaming African values and divisive sociopolitical system for the failure of aid. He also reaches, in a tongue-in-cheek manner, the Africa-infantilising conclusion "that Africa is now responsible for most of its own problems and that outsiders can help only if they are more direct and demanding in their relations with the continent" (Calderisi 2006, 7). To be sure, the general view held by Calderisi, Bolton and Kalu that Africans are generally to blame for their current woes because of the structure and culture of their societies is at present held by many, though with different conclusions about the consequences. Some of these Afropessimistic views go so far as to claim that some African states ought to be recolonised (Gilley 2017), or that weak African institutions in the current era of digital technology and big data will eventually roll back history, culminating in the recolonisation of Africa (Benyera 2021). These views exemplify why Niall Ferguson (2009, 9) disavows what he calls the "problematic, and…embarrassing [reality] that so much of the public debate about Africa's economic problems…[are] conducted by non-African white men" and, I should add, equally heavily influenced by knowledge institutions and categories rooted in the cultural West.

In all events, even though aid experts are dubious about the success of aid, especially in Africa, they have continued to regard aid, or at least a restructured international aid system, as the received wisdom of post-war development policy (Stiglitz 2002; Easterly 2006; Bolton 2008; Kalu 2018). It is precisely this mainstream view that aid can be depoliticised, restructured, or redirected to achieve poverty eradication *within* the current global order that this article challenges. My argument is that aid and the global order are intermeshed in such a way that to restructure foreign aid and/or its politics would require a restructuring or transformation of the global order itself, a system that Olúfẹmi O. Táíwò correctly refers to as "the Global Racial Empire" (Táíwò 2022). Indeed, I concur with Táíwò's history and analysis of the extant world system in his new book, *Reconsidering Reparations*. He argues that the (current) global racial empire is built on the structure of injustice installed by centuries of the Atlantic slavery economy and colonial plunder, both of which have found routes to continue, strengthen and multiply their impact on global social positions, politics and the economy to the present day.

In another field of relevant scholarship on aid, philosophers concerned with global justice are apparently persuaded of the mainstream development economics standpoint. Cosmopolitans, in particular, do not necessarily raise questions about whether development aid and humanitarian assistance should be given. Rather, they argue variously about whether aid in general should have a cut-off point or not, and whether aid should be given as charity with conditions or simply as a right, as a duty of global distributive justice (Singer 2004; 2016; Pogge 2008; Ord 2013). One key argument marshalled by these philosophers in favour of aid is a suggestion that not only is aid capable of helping to lift people out of poverty in the interim, but that development aid, if properly conducted, can help in redistributing global resources and eventually bring about an egalitarian world order.

2 I am unable to think of aid outside of its politics. By this I mean that it is impossible to think of foreign aid outside of the web of relationships and interests that go into determining who gets a particular pot of aid, at what time, and under what conditionalities. In other words, mine is a disavowal of Sach's false hope for an aid regime without politics.

Ord (2013) on his part pursues the interesting argument that in the ongoing controversy about whether foreign aid helps poor countries, critics have not factored in what he calls the "big wins" of health aid. He attempts to show that critics have reached the conclusion that aid does not work only "because they have failed to count the biggest successes of aid, such as the eradication of smallpox, which have been in the sphere of global health rather than economic growth". But this is a curious argument and looks suspiciously like a part to whole fallacy. For Ord moves from a presumed success of aid in the particular area of global health to imply the overall success of the many-sided programme of international aid, that is if we can all agree on what success entails in every aid project. Even were aid projects to be successful in their various economic and political components that involve richer countries funding anything from agricultural to military projects in poorer countries, it should still be conceivable that the entire international aid programme might be harmful to the recipients overall. This could be the case if the conditionalities attached to aid offers are such that they place recipients of aid in a position of eternal gratitude, indebtedness and dependency on powerful donors. More than this, as a seasoned researcher and critic of international aid points out, despite the successes with vaccination and other aid-driven global health successes "…all is not well in the garden of health"; it has not been a case of "untarnished success", not even in the area of health aid (Deaton 2013, 289–293). What with all the difficult questions about whether wealthy and powerful nations like the United States of America and the United Kingdom pay attention only when a particular disease affects or threatens them directly, as indeed the COVID-19 pandemic has made even more palpable, the ongoing politics of recrimination and medical nationalism surrounding the omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2 more than cast serious doubt on the goodwill of Western governments toward the rest of the world, especially Africa, even in the area of global health. Nonetheless, in practical terms, to demonstrate their unflinching confidence in the redemptive merits of aid, moral philosophers like Peter Singer and Toby Ord have gone so far as to respectively establish thelifeyoucansave.org and givingwhatwecan.org, which are platforms inviting people to donate toward ending world poverty. The question is: are these philosophers right? Are morally minded philosophers right in defending international aid in the face of what we now know about the not-so-behind-the-scenes politics of aid? Why continue to give foreign aid or support the giving of foreign aid to try and ameliorate poverty if it has been proven to generate the opposite effect, especially in Africa?

Scholars have adduced several insights to try and explain the allure of aid, including putting forward the counter-intuitive but interesting argument that donors continue to give because it is in their own best interest to continue to do so. Moyo (2009, 34, 61–62) explains the rationale behind this line of reasoning as follows:

> By the end of the 1980s, emerging-market countries' debt was at least US$1 trillion, and the cost of servicing these obligations colossal. Indeed, the cost became so substantial that it eventually dwarfed foreign aid going into poor countries – leading to a net reverse flow from poor countries to rich to the tune of US$15 billion every year between 1987 and 1989…Were it not for the tragic consequences, it would be farcical…In the donor's desperate quest to lend, and maintain the lender-borrower see-saw, the aid relationship tips in favour of the corrupt government. Almost to the absurd point where the donor has a greater need for giving the aid than the recipient has for taking it (see also Ferguson 1994).

This work seeks a deeper understanding of the global order with a view to unravelling *why* the aid industry produces or is reproduced in a matrix within which aid donors have a greater need for giving than the recipients have for receiving. This analysis attempts to proffer a consistent logic of aid and its relationship with the global order, and how this linkage reproduces poverty in certain regions of the world. Using a heuristic conceptual thought experiment,[3] this article depicts how it

3 In this article, I deploy a thought experiment following a tradition in the history of philosophy from Plato to Thomas Nagel to use metaphoric assumptions, imaginative scenarios, depictions and/or hypothetical situations to adduce important answers to complex philosophical problems. As devices of the imagination, thought experiments are especially useful when they can be supported by empirical evidence, an effort I make in this case in the sub-section entitled "The politics of aid in the real world". Also note that I use thought experiment and allegory interchangeably throughout the article.

all hangs together and how and why the current global economic order must *necessarily* rest on the politics of aid. While focusing on aid and the global order, the thought experiment simultaneously deepens the sense in which aid might be intermeshed with and implicated in the plethora of social conflicts currently engulfing the people and institutions of poorer regions of the world, especially sub-Saharan Africa, a fair understanding of which is already present in the extant literature on aid.

Apart from introducing a mechanism within which a consistent logical connection between the global order, poverty and the politics of aid can be established, the thought experiment I develop below is capable of providing new perspectives to aid criticism and goes beyond challenging the fundamental assumption upon which aid is a thing in the first place, which is that aid aims at engendering development and ending poverty, especially in Africa. This does not amount to regurgitating the extant arguments against international aid, but to explain why anti-aid arguments, in general, trump and will continue to succeed against the arguments in aid's favour, in short *to show that at present, an argument in defence of aid is an argument in favour of the unjust global order*. The explanatory merit of my thought experiment as it unfolds, I believe, lies in highlighting the obtuseness and unjust nature of the global order and the politics of aid by viewing their relationship analogously with another cluster of human activities where fair play is the norm: sports. Sporting activities are very frequently thought of as inherently just or should always be just and fair in their framework, and that *anyone*, every participant, must have at least, a theoretical chance to emerge successful or winners. More than this, my thought experiment's objective is to expose the global order as inherently unjust, highlighting exactly why aid fails, particularly in the context of aid to Africa, and especially in the era of global interdependence occasioned by an aggressive post-war pursuit of globalisation. In the last analysis, my contention is that one can only arrive at a successful argument *in favour* of aid, or drive a successful aid programme, first by launching a successful argument or campaign against the current global order. The converse, that is defending aid or looking to realise the lofty aims of international aid while the current global order subsists, in my considered opinion, is an exercise in futility. Let me attempt to explain why.

The global order as a "global games arena" – a thought experiment

Imagine a world where people from every region depend for their survival and flourishing on their participation in a "global games arena". In sporting events, participants are drawn from all over the world and athletes placed under three broad categories depending on the teams they represent and where those teams place in a region-based algorithm. Athletes are placed in Group One if they are representing teams placed under the Alpha region or Block A; Group Two, corresponding to teams classified under the Beta region, that is Block B; other athletes are placed in Group Three if they represent teams profiled under the Kappa region or Block K. The background yardstick for the placements is arrived at based on privileges and entitlements derived from unjust initial acquisitions and positions achieved through conquests, enslavement and colonialism, as well as other unjustly established and entrenched historical inequalities. What is more, the placements are done by officials who mostly hail from the Alpha region who are the chief beneficiaries of these historical injustices and fundamental inequalities, with a few of them drawn from Block B.

During tournaments, every event is typically won in between twelve to fifteen seconds. Meanwhile athletes in Group One are usually allowed to begin the race nine seconds ahead of athletes in Group Three and three seconds ahead of athletes in Group Two, while athletes in Group Two are given a six-second head start against athletes in Group Three. This means that the races are actually between athletes in Group One and Two. At the end of every tournament, as expected, only athletes in Groups One and Two win all the laurels, with most of the wins going to Group One athletes. And just as routinely, the athletes in Group Three are blamed for their "poor performances" and tasked to improve their skills for the next tournament. To encourage Group Three athletes to continue to participate, they are offered one form of consolatory gift or the other, and "expert" coaches and trainers that would help them improve their skills are recommended. These "kind gestures" come from officials of the games who happen to hail from the Alpha and a few from the Beta regions. Of course, kind gestures do nothing in the way of improving Group Three "performances". After years of persuasion, Group Three athletes try to improve their fortunes by employing some of the

expert trainers recommended – "experts" that routinely hail from the Alpha and Beta countries – thereby further depleting their already meagre revenue base to pay salaries to the already prosperous regions. Better training, of course, does nothing to improve the fortunes of athletes from the Kappa region.

As already hinted, the rule makers, officials and referees of the games are exclusively drawn from the Alpha region and a few others from B Block in every event and at all tournaments. Though, occasionally, an official from the Kappa region "retrained" in the Alpha region might be considered for inclusion as a referee in only a particular aspect of the games and for a temporary duration. Nonetheless, with the passage of time and different tournaments, some athletes in Group Three miraculously win some of the races. But when this happens, such athletes are immediately and unceremoniously disqualified or found guilty of flouting one rule of the games or the other, and the prizes and monetary benefits immediately returned to the grateful hands of athletes in Group One. In cases where no foul play could be pinned on a winning Group Three athlete, the category of the games they won is simply removed from the tournament. In some other cases, Block A and B teams will harangue or lobby the talented or miraculous athletes from Block K to switch sides and represent Groups One and Two teams in the next games without the knowledge of Block K teams and other athletes. In general, Block K athletes are frequently encouraged to enter secret agreements with A teams in particular, allowing the former to keep some of the proceeds of their wins, if ever, while diverting the rest to the latter's athletes.

Understandably, teams in Block A and some in Block B have become prosperous and wealthy through the lopsided wins their representative athletes have amassed over a long time. Also note that all participants to the global games usually pay participation levies, and as teams in Block K are never allowed to win, it means that their participation levies are always lost to the eventual winners. This further implies that Block A teams and some teams in the Beta region have also directly impoverished and weakened teams from the Kappa region. At some point, athletes in Block K become demoralised as the prospects of ever winning are non-existent and their capacity to continue to participate in the games systematically degraded. However, desirous to win at all costs after centuries of deprivation, some athletes and teams from the Kappa region invent ingenious approaches to the games that allow them to occasionally win and retain their laurels. They are again fined and banned for their troubles. As greater desperation sets in, teams from the Kappa region try to develop their own versions of the global games. They find insurmountable obstacles placed in their way by powerful organisers and patrons of the dominant global games. Apart from that, new games do not get much patronage because of lack of popularity and meagre funding. Eventually, the entire global games arena becomes conflict-ridden and dangerous for all participants as a never-to-recede battle line is drawn between the "winners" and the inconsolable "losers".

As conflicts and complaints by Kappa athletes and teams reach a certain crescendo, athletes and teams from the Alpha and Beta regions feel pressed to be "magnanimous" in victory, and so occasionally offer some of the proceeds of their wins as humanitarian assistance or inter-team aid to their losing counterparts from the Kappa region. Much of the pressure that A and B athletes feel comes from some of their *supporters* back at home who feel somewhat ashamed by the inglorious victories their athletes and teams win at the global games. On the other hand, athletes and teams from the Kappa region try their best to be obsequious toward their privileged competitors from A and B blocks. This further puts pressure on institutional processes and selection criteria on the home soil of Kappa teams. Conflicts and turmoil arise about representation in the Kappa region, as they fight it out to be given a chance at possible representation, only to appear at the global games to be given aid or humanitarian assistance, if not some recognition.

With the further passage of time, new rules are made allowing Alpha and Beta teams to be able to recruit athletes from Kappa teams to directly and legally represent them at the games, since there is clear evidence that many athletes from the Kappa region are actually better endowed and more capable than their privileged counterparts from other regions. This further exacerbates the state of internecine conflict in local selection and representation processes in the Kappa region, since there is now a chance that apart from aid, one could actually be given a chance to win individual honours at the games. Alpha and Beta teams notice this and try their best to milk the unfolding scenario.

They try their utmost best to cause maximum instability in teams from the Kappa region, since this increases the chances of neediness, co-option and exploitation. This allows A and B teams not only to harvest the best athletes from Kappa region, but to take back a hundredfold – in the form of bribes and lobbying funds – what they have given as team development aid or humanitarian assistance to athletes and teams from the Kappa region.

Over a long period of time, it becomes harder and harder for any aspiring athlete or team from the Kappa region to hope to be successful in the games without the endorsement of, or outright migration to Alpha or Beta countries. Athletes and/or teams that try to resist this system of things by avoiding the global games are profiled as rogue athletes/teams by the more powerful teams in Block A and the officials that almost always hail from the Alpha region. Opportunities are then sought by the Alpha region to further destabilise "rogue" teams from K Block and, occasionally, from B Block. No effort is spared in this destabilising mission, including using athletes and teams from around and within rogue teams to reverse any internal gains that might have been achieved after delinking from the global games. The result is that fewer and fewer teams or athletes have any incentive to attain a "rogue" status, even though this looks like a good way to overcome the tyranny of the global games and a route to prosperity. In the end, subjugation and fear help maintain a veneer of acceptance, universality and order in the global games.

The politics of aid in the real world

In the real world, our "global games arena" is the same as the global order. Replace "teams" with countries, "athletes" with governments, supporters with citizens and substitute the so-called First World with the Alpha region and the Second World and Third World with the Beta and Kappa regions respectively, and you are likely to get a truly unsettling picture of the current global order and its relationship with aid, poverty and social conflicts in certain regions of the world.[4] My depiction suggests that Third World countries in Africa, in particular, may never get justice unless a rupture occurs in the global order. Extant literature on the politics of aid shows that my "global games" thought experiment is analogously accurate in representing the injustice that the global order engenders and helps perpetuate. In the following analysis I rely on the global games thought experiment to offer new and revealing answers to the knottiest questions about aid. The unavoidable revelation is that the logic of foreign aid is, more than likely, accurately represented by Alyson's Karma colonialism. Karma colonialism views colonialism as integral to the current global order and explains how Europeans and their descendants attempt to perpetuate their centuries-old effort to control the lives of previously enslaved and colonised peoples, especially Africans.

The hope is that the global games thought experiment helps, among other things, to show that aid is but a symptom of an unjust global order put in place by those who have wielded the historical precedents of conquest (enslavement and colonialism) to give themselves more than a head start in every global event and arrangement. These historical precedents have given the same people the leverage in an interdependent world to make the ground rules governing vital human interactions and activities in the areas of trade, technology and law, as well as establish in their own terms institutions and bodies like the World Health Organization, the Bretton Woods institutions and the United Nations. Aid, I argue, is simultaneously a symptom of and an invisibilising mask for the unfair gains that certain regions of the world have made and continue to make because of these unfair advantages, and consequently undercutting the opportunities for poor countries and regions to become rich countries and regions.

To rely on the global games allegory to deepen a real-world analysis of the politics of aid in the current global order, with the stated objectives in mind, there is a need to spell out the following caveats. The first caveat is that the aid or foreign aid being discussed here is not to be confused with domestic aid or welfare benefits to the poor. Domestic aid is not the subject of discussion when we point to the ruinous effects of aid, even though, it should be noted, opposers of domestic aid frequently argue that aid to the poor creates the incentives for poor behaviour that in turn help to

4 This classification is more euphemistically called high-income, middle-income and low-income countries.

perpetuate poverty.[5] The concern with foreign aid is not about what it does to citizens or inhabitants of poor countries (or in the context of the global games depiction, supporters of athletes around the world), it is about what it does to governments and countries in poorer regions.

Second, foreign aid comes in different ways and from different quarters for different purposes and takes different forms. This article is not necessarily concerned with analysing the different forms aid takes, for example bilateral or multilateral aid, since this does not necessarily have a serious poverty-reduction implication for the outcome of any aid package to poorer countries. This work is concerned with why aid is necessarily intermeshed with the global order and, for that reason, does not and may never reduce poverty in certain regions of the world. I am also not concerned with explaining in great detail what impact aid might have, depending on its types or targets (military aid and medical aid for example) for the sufficient reason that aid is fungible. Which is to say that it does not matter whether a particular aid package targets medical, military, or educational support, since in the end, once that pot of money arrives in its destination country, it can be used for the purpose it was meant for, reappropriated for another purpose entirely, or simply pilfered. At the same time, if aid meant for educational support, for example, is used strictly for that purpose by the recipient country, nothing says that the funds so freed up from the local educational budget may not now be redirected to funding an unjust military campaign, or again simply stolen. Thus, regardless of the form aid takes, it does not change its apparent outcome for the poor inhabitants of countries on the wrong side of the existing global order. And so those distinctions are not helpful for an Africa-centred analysis of aid of the kind being carried out here.

The distinction between official development assistance (ODA) or aid transferred directly from rich countries to impoverished countries and humanitarian aid funnelled through international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) is important for this work, since like Dambisa Moyo (2009), I focus mainly on ODA that comes in the form of concessional loans and grants. But even when aid is passed through NGOs independent of governments, it

> …is at best an imperfect remedy…Schools and clinics operated by NGOs may free up funds for the government – and governments find ways of taxing (or simply diverting) the NGOs' resources. They can (and do) levy taxes on goods and equipment imported by the NGOs, or require expensive operating licenses. The same thing happens in humanitarian emergencies, especially in time of war, when warlords have to be bought off in order to allow humanitarian access to their own people. *In extreme cases, this has led to international NGOs flying in weapons along with food, to pictures of starving children being used to raise funds that were used in part to prolong war, or to NGO-funded camps being used as bases to train militias bent on genocide* (Deaton 2013, 264; emphasis added).

Many critics of aid have findings that buttress aspects of the above claims. James Ferguson's work in Lesotho and Edwin Nsah's more recent work in north-western and eastern regions of Cameroon provide empirical backing to the argument that the NGOs do not perform better in the field of trying to quell poverty through international aid projects. Ferguson (1994) reveals in lucid terms how the politics and language of development aid effectively cancelled out and made nonsense of the presence of a multitude of international NGOs in Lesotho between 1975 and 1984. Both Ferguson and Nsah through their empirical findings show that international NGOs did not help improve people's lives, if anything, poverty worsened in both case studies and countries. An interesting finding by both researchers was that aid work failed mainly because the recipients were never consulted to ascertain what their real problems were. The NGOs are answerable to the donors not the recipient community. In a particularly interesting report on a poor rural community in Cameroon, Nsah noted a fundamental disagreement between the inhabitants of that community and the NGOs about how best to tackle their poverty. Whereas the NGOs believed that the best way to begin to tackle extreme poverty among the people of the Baka community was to enrol their children in schools, the locals felt that it was unfair to send children to school on empty stomachs with most of them having to walk long distances via non-motorable tracks to school. Nsah (2021, 90–96) found

5 I take no sides in the domestic aid debate here, since there is no room in this article to do justice to that interesting debate.

that the locals agree that "education is a [long-term] solution to poverty", but they maintain that "education cannot be effective unless the issue of chronic poverty in this community is first solved" through supporting agriculture, which happened to be the mainstay of the Baka community. The locals were ignored, leading to the eventual failure of that aid project. So, it does not seem to matter too much how aid is transferred; the recurring negative outcomes of aid uptake suggest that it tends to do more harm than good.

The key question then becomes: why continue to give aid, especially to some (corrupt) governments of African countries, if it has been proven to be ineffective and counter-productive? As one analyst hints, it is surprising that after so many years and so many evaluation reports, books, commissions and so on, that those involved in aid have not either come up with some solution or decided to abandon it altogether (McNeill 2009). What is unclear in McNeill's statement of concern above is: who are "those" involved in aid? The worry is that he, like many others, may have lumped together the machinery of foreign aid bureaucracy and machinations of the donor countries' governments and the possible good intentions of their citizens. But like I have been arguing, the intentions of governments and citizens should be separated to expose the complicated nature of the aid industry and its rationale. My general view is that everyone in the aid web is not on the same page about what aid does and are not in a position to decide whether to continue, change the approach or simply stop. The lack of clarity about the relative positionalities of the actors in the aid web, even in the literature on aid, has not helped matters either.

To better appreciate how the complex interaction between the government of donor countries, their citizens, aid workers and the recipients of aid may be keeping the aid machine in motion without a serious attempt at a proper evaluation of its impact on the recipients on the part of those who should know better, let us note that

> [i]n earlier times, resources flowed in the opposite direction, from poor countries to rich countries – the spoils of military conquest and colonial exploitation. In later periods, rich-country investors sent funds to poor countries to seek profits, not to seek better lives for the locals. Trade brought raw materials to the rich countries in exchange for manufactured goods, but few poor countries have succeeded in becoming rich by exporting raw materials. Many have been left with a legacy of foreign ownership and internal inequality (Deaton 2013, 253).

The above insights are again a confirmation of the historical trajectory within which a global order emerged and that allows some people to start the race toward development and economic prosperity a lot earlier than others. Aid, if taken as a mechanism aimed at reversing the damages and unevenness of the global economic order, seems to be having the opposite effect. More than this, my suggestion is that it seems unlikely that aid was *ever* designed by *governments* of rich countries to benefit poor countries, even though donor citizens might see things differently, hence the constant push that their governments should donate even more.

In the context of actual administration of aid, the key argument of this research contradicts the assumption that aid was designed to benefit the recipients or that aid is still in place today because it is thought to help fight poverty. As a matter of fact, what keeps the aid industry active is in the very logic of the current global order, a governing rationality that the global games allegory captures and which Ferguson describes with near-cynical accuracy in the context of aid and national development: "The World Bank…for its part, makes literally no mention of politics. Where 'bureaucracy' is seen as a problem, it is not a political matter, but the unfortunate result of poor organization or lack of training" (Ferguson 1994, 65). That explains why representatives or governments of poorer countries are required to get better training to better participate in negotiating their economic futures in the context of the global order. At other times, weaker economies are required to (re)-introduce policies and programmes, such as structural adjustment policies and other (neo)-liberal marketing reforms to fit into the global economic order. This has the capacity to sublimate or sublate any radical or "rogue" economic transformation that may have been introduced by progressive leadership in the affected countries to conform with the dominant global economic order. African countries are often at the receiving end of these economic hegemonising gimmicks, beginning in the 1980s. The

prevailing regional and geopolitical factors are simply ignored, and if local politics gets blamed, it is only to the extent that the recipient African state government had put in place a corrupt and inept developmental bureaucracy, and once personnel are retrained and reorganised and/or encouraged to fit into a certain standard mould, development will begin to boom. But Dambisa Moyo has no such illusions and begs to strongly disagree.

Moyo in *Dead Aid* is unequivocal in stating that "[o]ne of the most depressing aspects of the whole aid fiasco is that donors, policymakers, governments, academicians, economists and development specialists know, in their heart of hearts, that aid doesn't work, hasn't worked and won't work" (Moyo 2009, 54). There is an interesting reason why Moyo's pessimism is likely justified:

> …Far from being a prescription for eliminating poverty, the aid illusion is actually an obstacle to improving the lives of the poor…Politicians in both donor and recipient countries understand this process. Recipient governments can use their own poor people as "hostages to extract aid from the donors". In one of the worst such cases, government officials in Sierra Leone held a party to celebrate the fact that UNDP had, once again, classed their country as the worst in the world and thus guaranteed another year's worth of aid. [In many cases]…Africans suffer to burnish the tarnished reputations of Western politicians. *The givers and receivers of aid, the governments in both countries, are allied against their own peoples. All that has changed from colonial times is the nature of what is being extracted* (Deaton 2013, 234, 255; emphasis added).

This further underscore the fact that governments and their people are not the same and are not always on the same page when the former go into contracts with donors, even though they ostensibly pursue the goal of prosperity which citizens yearn for. All over the world, governments are notorious for keeping their citizens in the dark about the details of their dealings, especially in the international arena. It might also be that citizens of donor or richer countries do not want to hear the truth in some cases. Since part of hearing the truth would be to come to terms with their own privileges and their complicitly in an unfair global order that favours them to stay rich by suffocating poorer societies through aid bondage.

Another reason why aid continues to be favoured above a restructuring or transformation of the global order is implicit in the above analysis. Aid is an instrument of political control and neo-colonial hegemony; it operates within the unevenness of historical injustice. In most cases, aid serves the interest of colonialist and imperialist countries as they move to exorcise themselves of the guilt of the past, to normalise and make invisible the gains of great crimes, while putting in place a strategy to legalise a continual "peace time" pillaging of their historical enemies and victims. This acute realisation prompted Ta-Nehisi Coates in "The Case for Reparations" to assert in the context of anti-black racism in the American banking sector that "[p]lunder in the past made plunder in the present efficient" (Coates 2014). After exploiting the recipients of aid in the most fundamental manner through resource theft, aid serves the psycho-moral purpose of helping the donor feel righteous again, to move toward *donor innocence*. Poor countries are in effect denied justice or equitable distribution of global resources, much of which are taken from their home soil, in exchange for destabilising foreign aid, which in turn keeps them needy with a Stockholm Syndrome feeling of indebtedness toward their donors, read oppressors. [6]

Thus, it should no longer be considered heterodox economics to say that aid is harmful to the recipient and only helps keep an unjust global order in place. For example, ODA value reduced substantially at the end of the Cold War, compared to the 1960s to 1980s standards, and that must tell us something about the donor governments' intent. It is hard to argue against the fact that aid was increasing during the heydays of the Cold War for reasons far removed from fighting poverty. More importantly, economic growth in Africa dramatically rebounded at the end of the Cold War as the aid tap was turned off, as the need to continue to manipulate Third World countries was temporarily non-existent. What became clear was that rich and powerful countries, especially, were fighting over the control of the local economies and politics of weaker countries, while at the same

6 Stockholm Syndrome: love and trust for one's oppressor.

time preparing for the possibility of using the inhabitants of these Third World countries as cannon fodder, in case of an all-out shooting world war. The Cold War windfall for Africa and other regions was not about fighting poverty in the first place. As a matter of fact,

> …[i]n most cases, aid is guided less by the needs of the recipients than by the donor country's domestic and international interests…Donors must balance a number of considerations, including political alliances and maintaining good relationships with ex-colonies where donors often have important interests. Domestic donor interests include not only citizens with humanitarian concerns, but also commercial interests that see both opportunities (sales of their goods) and threats (competition from developing countries) from foreign aid (Deaton 2013, 259–269; also see Perkins 2004; 2016; Moyo 2009).

As if on cue, as I was completing this article, a G7 summit was being held in Cornwall, the United Kingdom, from 11 to 13 June 2021. Led by the United States of America, the G7 countries, considered the wealthiest nations, released a joint communiqué – Carbis Bay G7 Summit Communiqué – at the end of the meeting that contained agreements that signalled what analysts in the West hailed as representing "a dramatic return of America's post-war international diplomacy" (Kanno-Youngs 2021). In what one commentator said evoked a déjà vu feeling about the 1883–1884 Berlin Conference, the G7 countries announced a plan they called "the Build Back Better World (B3W)" initiative to counter China's growing influence by offering developing nations an infrastructure plan that could rival President Xi Jinping's multi-trillion-dollar Belt and Road initiative (Holland and Faulconbridge 2021). The White House further claimed that apart from using this aid scheme to confront China, it was also about projecting American business values as positive alternatives to the Chinese model. What all this comes down to is that this was not really about helping the so-called developing nations to reach a certain infrastructural milestone in 2035, but everything was about protecting and advancing American, G7 and NATO values. The interest or well-being of poorer societies was secondary, if ever it mattered.

The above report gives additional credence to the lessons of the global games thought experiment. And this brings us right back to the question of whether any kind of aid, including health aid, was ever conceived in the interest of the recipients. Vaccine nationalism, an ongoing phenomenon thrown up by the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic helps remove almost every doubt. At the same G7 summit, the South African president, Cyril Ramaphosa, lamented the shortage of vaccines in African countries, pointing out that only about two per cent of Africa's 1.2 billion population has been vaccinated against the virus due to the unavailability of doses. Whereas richer nations in the global north had vaccinated up to fifty per cent of their populations. Among other appeals, he charged that it was about time African countries were allowed to produce their own vaccines if Africa were to join the rest of the world in emerging from the COVID crisis. The report was that his appeal enjoyed widespread support at the summit (Makhafola 2021). But this was not the first or only time an appeal of this nature has been made to ensure equitable distribution of vaccines. The Director General of the World Trade Organization (WTO), Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, and her World Health Organization (WHO) counterpart, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus had made a similar plea back in March 2021 (Pietromarchi 2021). But all kinds of objections were raised against patent waivers by big pharmaceutical companies protected by laws enacted by governments in the Global North. It remains to be seen whether things will change this time, but as Ramaphosa highlights, "…the cost of inaction [in this case] is measured in people's lives". Ramophosa's warning could not have been more prescient, unfortunately, given the eventual rise of the omicron variant of SARS-CoV-2, which ironically has become the dominant strain in many countries, including First World countries, aside South Africa itself. One would not be very wrong to argue that if the wealthy countries and powerful governments really cared about Africa and other poorer regions, the COVID-19 pandemic presented an excellent situation to demonstrate an abiding goodwill. The fact that leaders of governments and institutions from the Global South, especially Africa and India have had to make this call repeatedly and unheeded for so long to no avail in the face of a global pandemic, more than underscores the desire by the governments of First World countries to start every proverbial race earlier than weaker regions, at all costs.

Conclusion

The most important question for critical scholars concerned with aid ought to undergo a fundamental modification. Rather than ask why failure is the norm in international aid-giving, they should increasingly follow the trajectory of this research to ask: *what is served by the failure of aid*? In this way, if one considers the expansion and entrenchment of a Western presence and influence in the local politics and social life of people in Third World countries and the attendant weakening of local state actors and institutions, especially on the global stage, as the principal effect of aid, then the promise of development or humanitarian assistance serves simply as a point of entry for an intervention of a very different character. Seeing things from this perspective, foreign aid is not a channel for the transfer of capital, goods and services from affluent nations and/or institutions to poorer societies with the aim of eliminating poverty that was in the first place created by these affluent nations and institutions. Aid is a mechanism for reinforcing and expanding the exercise of the hegemonic power of First World countries. To penetrate weaker countries, powerful countries often chant the "poverty" or "human rights" trope as a pretext to launch an intervention that may have no effect on poverty and human rights abuses, but does in fact have other concrete effects, however much these other destabilising concrete effects are denied as the intended outcomes.

The current catastrophe in Afghanistan read within the economic context serves as one of the severest rebuke against aid dependency in living memory, a deathly rebuttal of any argument in defence of aid. The World Food Programme (WFP) recently announced that – in what could become the world's worst ever humanitarian crisis – more than 23 million Afghans or most of that country's population need urgent humanitarian support, as they face acute food shortages in the near future. This is because the Afghan economy which had depended on international aid for more than 75% of its public spending for decades has quite simply collapsed as the Taliban took over governmental power and the aid tap was suddenly cut off. Afghanistan may still rebound through internal rebuilding and value creation, but for now, what the disturbing situation in that country teaches us is that aid does not bring about lasting development or enduring wealth creation. The biggest lesson, in my opinion, is that aid means very little outside of its politics.

Conversely, those who advocate for more aid need to explain how it can be given in a way that deals with the political constraints immanent in the regnant global order. Deaton (2013, 288) has it that

> [t]hey should also think hard about the parallels with the colonialism that came before the era of aid. We now think of colonialism as bad, harming others to benefit ourselves, and aid as good, hurting us (albeit very mildly) to help others. But that view is too simple, too ignorant of history, and too self-congratulatory. The rhetoric of colonialism too was all about helping people, albeit about bringing civilization and enlightenment to people whose humanity was far from fully recognized. This may have been little more than a cover for theft and exploitation. The preamble to the charter of the UN, with its ringing and inspiring rhetoric, was written by Jan Smuts, premier of South Africa, who saw the UN as the best hope of preserving the British Empire and the dominance of white "civilization". Yet at its worst, decolonization installed leaders who differed little from those who preceded them, except for where they were born and the color of their skins (also see Gebremariam 2021).[7]

Thomas Sankara was more forthcoming in criticising debt and external political control arising from and legitimated by foreign aid to Africa. This he did by calling for a united front against debt and foreign aid in a famous speech he delivered at the summit of the Organisation of African Unity (now the African Union) in Addis Ababa in 1987:

> We think that debt has to be seen from the standpoint of its origins. Debt's origins come from colonialism's origins. Those who lend us money are those who had colonized us before. Under its current form, that is imperialism-controlled, debt is a cleverly managed

7 Also see Sasha Alyson (2021) at https://karmacolonialism.org/yes-its-still-colonialism/.

> re-conquest of Africa, aiming at subjugating its growth and development through foreign rules (Sankara 1987, cited in Akugizibwe 2012).

So, one must conclude that aid is hardly ever given to a poor country for the purpose of tackling poverty among its citizens. Aid is given by those who know they must give to keep the current unjust global order in place, a global games arena where only they can be winners in every economic summit or plan, in every trade agreement and in every negotiation on the proverbial world table. Aid is therefore necessarily tied to the global order in such a way that the only way to make aid effective or altogether end aid and its penurious impact would be to jettison the international order or remake the current world system built on the unjust and oppressive structures of slavery and colonialism and their afterlives (Getachew 2019; 2020; Táíwò, 2022).

Acknowledgements
Other Universals Consortium – a project funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation.

ORCID iD
Chika C. Mba – https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0125-0138

References

Akugizibwe, P. 2012. "'Debt is a cleverly managed reconquest of Africa' – Thomas Sankara." *This is Africa*, 23 July [media platform]. https://thisisafrica.me/politics-and-society/debt-cleverly-managed-reconquest-africa-thomas-sankara/

Alyson, S. 2020. "Karma colonialism." https://karmacolonialism.org/

Alyson, S. 2021. "Yes, it's still colonialism." https://karmacolonialism.org/yes-its-still-colonialism/

Benyera, E. 2021. *The Fourth Industrial Revolution and the recolonisation of Africa: the coloniality of data.* London: Routledge. doi:10.4324/9781003157731

Bolton, G. 2008. *Aid and other dirty business: An insider uncovers how globalisation and good intentions have failed the world's poor*. London: Ebury Press.

Calderisi, R. 2006. *The Trouble with Africa: why foreign aid isn't working*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Chakravarti, A. 2005. *Aid, institutions and development: new approaches to growth, governance and poverty*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Coates, T.-N. 2014. "The case for reparations." *The Atlantic*, June. https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/#v-the-quiet-plunder

Collier, P. 2007. *The bottom billion: Why the poorest countries are failing and what can be done about it.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Deaton, A. 2013. *The great escape: Health, wealth, and the origins of inequality*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Easterly, W. 2001. *Elusive quest for growth: Economists' adventures and misadventures in the tropics*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press.

Easterly, W. 2006. *The white man's burden: why the west's efforts to aid the rest have done so much ill and so little good*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Ferguson, J. 1994. *The Anti-Politics Machine: "Development", Depoliticization and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Ferguson, N. 2009. "Foreword." In: *Dead aid: Why aid is not working and how there is a better way for Africa*, by D. Moyo, 9–11. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Gebremariam, E. B. 2021. "Reflections from teaching African Development using decolonial perspectives at LSE." *London School of Economics* [blog]. https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/internationaldevelopment/2021/05/25/reflections-from-teaching-african-development-using-decolonial-perspectives-at-lse/

Getachew, A. 2019. *World making after Empire: the rise and fall of self-determination*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Getachew, A. 2020. "Colonialism made the modern world: Let's remake it." *New York Times*, 27 July. https://nyti.ms/39xf8OP
Gilley, B. 2017. "The case for colonialism." *Third World Quarterly*. doi:10.1080/01436597.2017.1369037
Griffiths, P. 2003. *The Economist's tale: A consultant encounters hunger and the World Bank*. London: Zed Books. doi:10.5040/9781350250987
Holland, S. and G. Faulconbridge. 2021. "G7 rivals China with grand infrastructure plan." *Reuters*. https://www.reuters.com/world/g7-counter-chinas-belt-road-with-infrastructure-project-senior-us-official-2021-06-12/
Kalu, K. 2018. *Foreign aid and the future of Africa*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan. doi:10.1007/978-3-319-78987-3
Kanno-Youngs, Z. 2021. "G7 News: Summit ends with agreement on global minimum tax and common threats." *New York Times*, 13 June. https://www.nytimes.com/live/2021/06/13/world/g7-summit
Makhafola, G. 2021. "Ramaphosa again calls on rich G7 countries to support Covid-19 vaccine patent waiver." *News24*. https://www.news24.com/news24/southafrica/news/ramaphosa-again-calls-on-rich-g7-countries-to-support-covid-19-vaccine-patent-waiver-20210613
McNeill, D. 2009. "What is wrong with aid? What is wrong with Africa?" *Forum for Development Studies* 36(1): 199–211. doi:10.1080/08039410.2009.9666430
Moyo, D. 2009. *Dead aid: Why aid is not working and how there is a better way for Africa*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
Nsah, E. 2021. "NGOs and poverty reduction in the North West and East region of Cameroon." Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Cape Town, South Africa.
Ord, T. 2013. "Aid works (on average)." https://studylib.net/doc/13259236/aid-works--on-average--toby-ord-president--giving-what-we
Perkins, J. 2004. *Confessions of an economic hit-man*. San Francisco: Berrett Koehler Publishers.
Perkins, J. 2016. *The new confessions of an economic hit-man*. San Francisco: Berrett Koehler Publishers.
Pietromarchi, V. 2021. "Patently unfair: Can waivers help solve COVID vaccine inequality?" *Al Jazeera*, 1 March. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/1/can-a-waiver-on-ip-rights-solve-vaccine
Pogge, T. 2008. *World poverty and human rights: cosmopolitan responsibilities and reform.* 2nd edn. Malden: Polity Press.
Riddell, R. 2007. *Does foreign aid really work?* New York: Oxford University Press.
Sachs, J. 2005. *The end of poverty: Economic possibilities for our time*. New York: The Penguin Press.
Sachs, J. 2006. "Depoliticize Development Aid." *Economist's View* [blog]. https://economistsview.typepad.com/economistsview/2006/03/jeffrey_sachs_d.html
Shirley, M. M. 2008. *Institutions and development*. Northampton, Massachusetts: Edward Elgar.
Singer, P. (Original work published in 2002) 2004. *One world: the ethics of globalization.* 2nd edn. New Haven: Yale University Press.
Singer, P. 2016. *One world now: the ethics of globalization.* New Haven: Yale University Press.
Stiglitz, J. 2002. *Globalization and its discontents*. New York: Norton.
Táíwò, O. O. 2022. *Reconsidering Reparations*. New York: Oxford University Press. doi:10.1093/oso/9780197508893.001.0001

Received 27 June 2021; revised 11 March 2022; accepted 16 March 2022