



## UNLEASHING POWER FROM WITHIN: REJECTING THE FOREIGN AID FARCE

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### *Abstract*

The article looks inward to reclaim belief systems, practices and a creative ingenuity (represented by the health sciences here) that sustained life on the African continent for centuries. To make the point, I address the controversial issue of aid to Africa, which is increasingly stirring contention between proponents and opponents, and provoking the emergence of a new breed of conscientious African activists who oppose aspects of the process. The essay establishes the connection between debt and the brief reference to traditional African medicine.

*Keywords:* debt, traditional, african medicine

### Preamble – It’s Not *Just* Palm-Wine

As a young boy I typically acquiesced to the decisions of older friends and family members; otherwise, I might have been skeptical about my aunt’s prescribed method of treating me for measles. It was at wartime and even the more privileged citizens of Biafra<sup>1</sup> didn’t have access to quality healthcare. Mama Nkechi, as we fondly called my mother’s older sister, stripped me stark naked and proceeded to treat me by spraying mouthful after mouthful of palm-wine all over my body. After a few days of performing the ritual, the spots and sores completely disappeared from my skin, leaving no signs of the infection.

A veteran and beneficiary of African traditional medicine, my aunt had given birth to five of her six healthy children at home, relying largely on women who had mastered the art and science of nursing pregnant women and ensuring the safe delivery of their children. These women, often referred to as “midwives,” are products of ancient medical practices and their proficiency confirms the wisdom and effectiveness of these practices. Studies show that the legacy was transplanted to the New World by African female slaves (Zook 2005, Ellerby-Brown 2008, Susie 2009).

Prior to contracting measles, I had already been exposed to the power of traditional medicine through my paternal grandfather, a local healer who traveled far and

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wide because his services were in high demand. A scar that I still carry on my upper right arm is a reminder of the initial healing balm that he had applied there following a sudden swell in that part of my body. In his book, *The Great Judge*, late Justice A. Aniagolu describes the treatment he received from a local herbalist when he contracted tonsillitis:

After his father's death, the young Nnaemezie almost lost his own life to a bad case of tonsillitis...his mother, Akaja, rushed Nnaemezie to an herbalist in the nearby village of Ebe, who was renowned for treating such ailments.... The traditional doctor put a wedge in the boy's mouth to ensure that it stayed open and with his finger reached into his throat and broke the swelling. The herbal preparations that were poured down Nnaemezie's throat did a good job of killing off the army of harmful microbes that must have been living on the herbalist's fingers, preventing them from multiplying and causing infection. Thus cured, Nnaemezie's life was saved. (2009, 4)

I have also witnessed an exceptional, indigenous method of curing malaria, which entails spreading a blanket over both the patient and a pot in which a variety of herbs have been boiled. After a while the patient emerges from under the blanket sweating profusely and in a few days (sometimes in a few hours) begins to experience relief.

However, the focus here is not on traditional medicine but on the need to look inward and reclaim belief systems, practices and a creative ingenuity (represented by the health sciences here) that sustained life on the African continent for centuries. To make the point, I must segue into the controversial issue of aid to Africa, which is increasingly stirring contention between proponents and opponents, and provoking the emergence of a new breed of conscientious African activists who sternly oppose aspects of the process.<sup>2</sup> In spite of what may appear as disparate subjects, this essay later establishes the connection between this issue and the brief reference to traditional African medicine.

### Aid to Africa, Repression with a Smile and Handshake

Pertinent here is a debate that was held on June 1, 2009. Four debaters participated in this discussion with two for and two against the motion, "Be it resolved foreign aid does more harm than good" (Munk Debates 2009). Dambisa Moyo, Zambian author and international economist was the only African on the panel and spoke against foreign aid. Majority of the audience members were also non-Africans. It is inconceivable that a forum on healthcare in America, for instance, would feature a

majority of non-American discussants and participants. Not surprisingly; therefore, Moyo began her opening statement by sarcastically thanking the “Munk organizers for allowing me, as an African, to say a few words about my continent even though I’m not a celebrity.”<sup>3</sup> Responding to the setup of the debate, I subsequently posted the following comment on Moyo’s Facebook wall:

I thought it was rather interesting that you were the only African who participated in the 2009 Munk Debate on foreign aid to Africa. A similar Intelligence Squared debate was held in 2007, in which out of six debaters only one African, Professor George Ayittey, a Ghanaian Economist, participated in the discussions.<sup>4</sup> I think the very structure of these debates ironically establishes what is wrong with aid to Africa—the fact that a group of non-Africans have convinced themselves that they have the ultimate answer to Africa’s destiny and subsequent growth. In the process, they have developed a superiority complex spawned by the fabricated notion that they are dealing with helpless, wretched people whose hope is dependent on their sustenance. It is this type of condescending ideal that has thrust them into the assumed role of prime spokespersons for the issue, which is why they are also featured at these debates to the marginalization of Africans.

(My reference in the above statement to another debate on aid to Africa organized by Intelligence Squared in 2007 is important here as this debate will be later re-examined in greater detail and will constitute a key segment of this essay.)

### *My Stand on the Issue*

I believe it is important to establish at an early state that I am unapologetically in agreement with those who disagree with and denounce the general condescending and often indiscriminate manner of aid delivery to Africa. This is the thrust of this essay, which will partially focus on and use the two debates mentioned above to bolster my perspective. Although I will briefly refer to the views expressed by debaters who favor foreign aid to Africa, my goal is not at all to engage in an argument with these champions of the practice. I simply disagree with them and their overriding assertion that Africans need foreigners to resolve their problems and pamper and nurse them back to decent socioeconomic health. This, of course, does not negate the importance of international and regional cooperation, which, however, is a different topic. I will therefore spend the greater part of this essay establishing why I subscribe to other more practical methods of sustainable development for Africa over foreign aid,

rather than arguing with proponents of a tradition of patronizing assistance that has repeatedly proven to be an impediment to viable growth.

### *The Foreign, Self-Absorbed Approach*

Since this article emphasizes the need for self-revaluation as a means to progress in Africa, my primary concern is with the views of the African intellectuals who had the privilege of expressing themselves at the forums cited above (even if the focus was on their continent). In this regard, I agree with Kingsley Moghalu who states:

...a lot of the books that have been written about Africa's economic evolution in recent years— the “Africa rising” narrative— have been written by non-Africans. I feel that Africans must first and foremost take control of the analysis of their own history and evolution. They have to understand and own their own story and tell it to the world as they understand it, not always receiving the interpretations of others about us. (July 2013)

But since African development is often deliberated alongside the importance of reinforcing economic cooperation with the African Diaspora, let us also listen to the views articulated by the only Westerner of African ancestry who contributed to one of these debates. He is C. Payne Lucas, co-founder and former President of Africare, the oldest and largest African American non-profit organization dedicated to providing aid to Africa. He spoke at the Intelligence Squared debate and advocated aid for Africa.<sup>5</sup> I must acknowledge upfront that Lucas' passion for Africa and commitment to the advancement of its peoples cannot be overemphasized. He deserves much commendation and his motives without a doubt are sincere. The truth; however, is that there is absolutely nothing that Africare is doing for Africans that Africans cannot do for themselves with appropriate reforms and proper management of their brilliant human and rich natural resources. I also think Lucas is sorely, even if innocently mistaken in his rationalization of foreign aid. I will review some of his major points.

Lucas' notion that Africa is deserving of more aid money because billions are sunk in contentious projects like the Iraqi war reflects a poor understanding of the fundamental points raised by those who are against the type of aid that he espouses. Aid to Africa should not be dependent on the efficacy or lack thereof of US foreign policies and the financing of such policies. But an even weaker argument is advanced by Lucas when he suggests that the continent is endowed with enough diligent leaders who are capable of ensuring the efficient use of aid. For dictators like former Zairian<sup>6</sup> leader, Mobutu Sese Sekou, he makes the predictable and clichéd argument that blame should be placed on America and other Western countries that created

such dictators in a bid to have access to their mineral resources. Such exoneration of kleptocratic African dictators no longer sits well with Africans who are tired of the archetypal accusation of external sources and forces for Africa's problems. It is a perspective that delineates the African as lacking the initiative to know right from wrong and the willpower to resist external influences that are detrimental to his/her progress. Being a Black American, Lucas must be aware that in spite of the suppression his people have historically endured, they have been able to conquer seemingly insurmountable odds and currently desire to be perceived as a people who can excel if afforded equal opportunity, rather than as a people who helplessly sit back and wait for alms. Aware that several nations, in spite of being victims of detrimental foreign intrusions, have been able to rebuild their lives and economies, Africans are increasingly looking to themselves and acknowledging weaknesses therein. We also fail to understand how the same forces that are blamed for the continent's underdevelopment are paradoxically being sought for deliverance through aid.

Still disputing the incompetence of Africa's leaders, Lucas lauds Nigeria's former President Olusegun Obasanjo and commends his appointment of Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala as Finance Minister, who he claims carried out a major anti-corruption campaign. But there is little or nothing to show for this alleged campaign even if Okonjo-Iweala cannot be faulted. Also on corruption and contrary to Lucas' claim, the late General Sani Abacha is not the prime culprit vis-à-vis the looting of Nigeria's wealth. Abacha was merely a symptom of a larger problem, but not the problem itself. There were thieves before him and since his death the thieves continue to thrive brazenly. The problem is so deep-seated that honesty currently seems to be an aberration while fraud tends to earn veneration. And if there is any merit to Lucas' recognition of charisma in certain past and present African leaders<sup>7</sup>—Obasanjo, Joaquim Chissano (Mozambique) and Amadou Toure (Mali)—such charisma should be assessed against the backdrop of their delivery of public goods (healthcare, agriculture, infrastructure, education, security), which should not be the responsibility of donor governments and institutions. Lucas' conclusions about these leaders, aside from being skewed, reads like the recital of typical government-run media and other official reports. In spite of his lofty rhetoric and genuine concerns for Africa, he is clearly swayed by status quo half-truths. To have a good grasp of the issues he raises, information must be sought from a broad cross-section of the African people at various social and status levels, and not a clique of VIP officials or the press that they control.

In his veneration of Africa's leadership, Lucas underscores the point made by opposing debater, George Ayittey, who cites approximately 16 countries as making significant economic and democratic progress. According to Lucas, this shows that the continent is doing well beyond his estimation.<sup>8</sup> In spite of the love that so many have for President Obama, all hell would break loose in America if he tried to extend

his tenure by one week. But Africans should be content with dictators that have imposed themselves on their people for 30 plus years? Why must standards be lowered and gladly accepted by and for Africans? Out of the 54 countries on the continent, we deserve 54 conscientious leaders, nothing less; and even if we cannot have 54 should we truly be excited about having 16?

Predictably, Lucas resorts to the conventional theory that Africa needs all the foreign help it can get because of the prevalence of diseases like smallpox and river blindness, infrastructural shortage and the need for effective governance in nations like Liberia. This is a standard line of argument used by proponents of foreign aid to Africa. He is right in his reference to the existence of these problems, but Africa is also materially, financially and resourcefully equipped to manage all these problems. Whereas some African nations may lack the requisite wealth and resources, others have more than enough with which to offset such deficiency. There are also those extreme situations of war, famine and other natural disasters in which the victims are largely destitute and genuinely need support, but even in such instances the initial and primary assistance should come from within the continent. Lucas' observation here reiterates the standard, degrading image of a clueless and inferior region that is incapable of tackling its challenges. But Africans are increasingly rejecting the latter suggestion of helplessness. Indeed, as Kingsley Moghalu rightly points out, "Africans have been increasingly seeing themselves not as basket cases of hopelessness, but as having possibilities. Many people have now begun to see Africa as place where business can be done and good money made" (2013).

Also coming as no surprise is Lucas' reference to America's generosity as a valid reason why Africa should be its dependent. True, America's munificence may be substantiated by compelling arguments, but there is something paradoxical about its absence in dire domestic situations. Where was this generosity when Hurricane Katrina ravaged New Orleans in 2005, causing untold loss of life and property, mostly to African Americans? Let us consider a number of other social issues that affect African Americans perhaps more adversely than any other racial or ethnic group in America. They include: crime and poverty-stricken ghettos, unemployment, drug and gang infested neighborhoods, excessive school dropout rates, teenage pregnancy, the disproportionate murder of unarmed Black men by the police and an alarming (even if controversial) number of incarcerated Black men (Thomas 2013, Oliver 1989, Oliver, *Family Education*). Shouldn't generous American philanthropists be investing more in programs that address these problems existing in their backyards? Instead, there is this constant, curious urgency to do a hop, step and jump across the Atlantic to help desperate Africa. Lucas matches America's generosity with an implied competence when he proudly announces that "we" need to be in Africa because "we know how to get things done." "Get things done" as in where...Iraq? Vietnam? Afghanistan? Somalia? Panama? The insinuation, of course, is that Africans do not

have the capacity “to get things done” in their own interest and therefore need the help of a benefactor.

Lucas ends on an interesting note, stressing that if America doesn’t assist Africa, the Chinese will overrun the continent with the prime goal of exploiting its resources. But isn’t it for the same reason that Lucas claimed America got involved in the Congo in the first place? In other words, he inadvertently admits that (like the Chinese?) America’s provision of aid is motivated by personal profit and subsequently agrees with Ayittey that aid is not totally free<sup>10</sup> but is often dispersed in “the economic interests of donor countries” (Meyer 2012).

In all, Lucas’ stand on aid to Africa, notwithstanding his being of African descent, displays the typical, patronizing perspective exhibited by the West towards challenges on the continent. Of course there are many members of the Diaspora who would not share Lucas’ views, but his position is significant since he is viewed as a leading American “Africanist” with a good grasp of issues concerning Africa, as well as an accomplished philanthropist with genuine concerns for development on the continent. In the end, he unintentionally reinforces the truth that Africa must take charge of its own destiny.

## The Conscientious African Approach

Compared to other speakers at the Munk and Intelligence Squared debates, only Dambisa Moyo and Ayittey substantially target the root of the problem, offsetting the standard error of evaluating consequences without first dealing with causes. In the end, they both demonstrate that without this approach longstanding solutions to Africa’s underdevelopment will remain elusive. A breakdown of some of their salient points follows.

### *The Failure of Foreign Aid to Africa Is All Too Apparent*

Moyo argues that “It has been 60 years and a trillion dollars of aid” to Africa from wealthy nations, with little to show for it.<sup>11</sup> In her essay, “Why Foreign Aid Is Hurting Africa” she contends that despite this huge number, per-capita income is less than it was in the 1970s and up to 350 million Africans currently survive on less than one dollar a day.<sup>12</sup> Ayittey makes a similar observation when he says, “More than 600 billion has been poured into Africa since 1960 with nothing to show for it except a multitude of black elephants and crumbled infrastructure and decaying buildings.”<sup>13</sup> Symbolic of this façade of feasible relief is the deplorable, filthy, disease infested Kibera slum in Nairobi, Kenya, which is paradoxically located close to the United Nations agency for human settlements, a body allotted millions of dollars

to supposedly prevent and/or alleviate the type of appalling conditions existing in the slum (Moyo 2009).

### *Foreign Aid is Not a Gift*

According to Ayittey, “Foreign aid is not free; it is a very soft loan which is given to a government on concessional rates” and “80 percent of US aid to Africa is spent right here in America on American contractors, American suppliers.”<sup>14</sup> In the process of giving; therefore, there are personal business and professional gains and personal losses (for taxpayers). To reinforce his point, Ayittey quotes entrepreneur and philanthropist George Soros as having stated that “aid benefits the donors more than the recipients.”<sup>15</sup> Moyo submits the same point from a different angle when she quotes a statement by Hungarian Economist Peter Bauer to cap her argument: “Aid is money taken from the poor in rich countries and sent to the rich in poor countries (sic).”<sup>16</sup> So, beyond a demonstration of altruistic charity, the view that ulterior, personal and economic motives are a key part of the foreign aid culture is not without merit as Moyo and Ayittey indicate. With the extensive exclusion of “non-VIP” Africans from policymaking and administrative procedures, and with the involvement of millions of dollars; the results, even if partial, are liaisons between top government, development or corporate officials (or their representatives) in donor and recipient nations—what essentially manifests as profitable business agreements in spite of the notion of “non-profit” that is often touted.

### *Corruption*

The cavalier, kleptomaniacal conduct of many African leaders, past and present, has been widely documented. Mobutu Sese Sekou (Zaire), Bakili Muluzi (Malawi), Sani Abacha (Nigeria), Ibrahim Babangida (Nigeria), Frederick Chiluba (Zambia) and Jean-Bédél Bokassa (Central African Republic) are just a few out of several African leaders whose popularity is partly attributed to the millions of dollars they purportedly stole from their countries (Meyer 2012). Some would argue that such crooked leaders exist everywhere, not just in Africa. My response is, so what!! Serial killers exist in the United States; should we therefore exonerate serial killers if we found them in Africa? Besides, it is one thing to be a crooked leader and another thing to be a crooked leader asking for aid money. The autocratic nature and lack of transparency of many African governments suggests that a lot of aid will not serve its projected intention. Freelance writer Courtney Meyer thus concludes that “many rulers of recipient countries” perceive foreign aid as enabling “the continuation of patronage allowing [them] to maximize the needs of themselves and certain specific groups of society over the wellbeing of the wider population” (2012). Still on this subject of mismanagement, Ayittey enunciates the findings of Nigeria’s Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) under Nuhu Ribadu, its former Executive



Chairman, which alleged that between 1970 and 2000 Nigeria earned \$450 billion in oil revenue, out of which 412 billion was stolen by military and civilian rulers. Reports by the African Union (AU), Ayittey further disclosed, show that corruption costs Africa about 148 billion dollars every year. This is more than five times the amount of foreign aid Africa receives.<sup>17</sup> I found it very interesting that no one on the opposition team (at the Intelligence Squared debate) challenged these assertions by Ayittey, which are highly critical to the question of aid to Africa.

But even more disturbing is the participation of philanthropic organizations in aid-related fraudulent practices. Northwestern University Professor, Jeffrey Winters, in a 2004 hearing before the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations accused the World Bank of being involved in the misappropriation of roughly \$100 billion of its loan funds supposedly earmarked for development (Moyo 2009). In 2010, the Academy for Educational Development (AED) was suspended by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) for allegedly misappropriating funds that ran into millions of dollars. This onetime, Washington DC-based, non-profit organization carried out extensive international federal contracting focusing on education, health and economic development. Predictably, a significant number of its initiatives were being implemented in African countries. Following intervention from the US Department of Justice, AED's programs and staff were eventually transferred to another USAID contractor non-profit agency, Family Health International (FHI). AED has since ceased to exist.<sup>18</sup>

The consolation here is that some non-profits are beginning to readjust their policies in favour of encouraging self-reliance and concentrating more rigorously on regions that genuinely need assistance. Recently I spoke to a friend who works for World Vision, one of the world's leading Christian humanitarian organizations. He explained how World Vision considered setting up some of its programs in Nigeria but finally changed its mind. I asked him why and he explained that after assessing Nigeria's situation the organization concluded that Nigeria does not require foreign aid but proper management of its natural and human resources. His response was most reassuring.

The solution; therefore, is not incessant, irrational supply of foreign aid to Africa, but a process of reformation that would hold leaders accountable and that would ensure that effective measures are put in place to stem the massive depletion of the continent's wealth through unrestrained grand theft. Only then would conducive environments emerge for more foreign direct investment, the creation of business opportunities unhindered by undue bureaucratic regulations and the expansion of rewarding trade relations, all of which would outdo the degrading, even if deodorized regression engendered by foreign aid.

*Disregard For the Wishes of Africans*

Ayittey and Moyo cite that aspect of foreign aid that practically disenfranchises the African people by excluding them from key decision-making policies regarding their wellbeing and development, a phenomenon that deprives them the opportunity for socioeconomic self-determination.<sup>19</sup> If donors really want to help Africa, Ayittey points out, they should “ask the Africans what they want; don’t assume that you know better than the Africans.”<sup>20</sup> Essentially, without asking Africans, there is the implied but insulting notion that Africans are ignorant of the needs of an environment and world-view that they have occupied for centuries. This is a typical imperialist approach to African issues, which is why German journalist Kurt Gerhard describes Western advocates of aid to Africa as “the de facto occupying powers of the post-colonial period” (2010). Gerhard goes on to elaborate on the drawbacks in bypassing the African people on issues of humanitarian assistance:

Our development aid has not lent enough support to the efforts of people in Africa themselves. Often it has even been an impediment, because our aid was focused too much on the object and too little on the subject. Too often the project or program, not the people, was the focus. The aid passed the people by. (Ibid.)

When Africans are bypassed in decision processes that affect their lives, their leaders are disposed to a lackadaisical attitude as they finally abdicate their responsibilities to donor nations and organizations to which they render their allegiances.<sup>21</sup> Their obligation to the people is progressively weakened and the same people end up as victims of a failed system. Gerhard describes this acute submission to external bailouts as indicative of “the greatest damage done, far worse than the enormous material losses engendered by failed aid projects” (Ibid.). Along the same lines, Ugandan journalist Andrew Mwenda’s insists that “unearned income [aid] leads to an expansion in unnecessary government spending and bureaucracy, and a reduction in government accountability” (July 2006). The nonchalant attitude of many African leaders should therefore come as no surprise, and neither should the results of their negligence, which Ayittey delineates in his claim that only about 16 African countries are democratic and “less than 10 can be characterized as economic success stories.”<sup>22</sup> The implication; therefore, is that foreign donors, and not the African people, continue to have a major say in shaping Africa’s economic and political destiny. For a continent ruled mostly by autocratic leaders who are more interested in consolidating power than meeting the needs of the people, this suppressive structure is not likely to be met with great resistance.

## The Example of Biafra

Self-determination and autonomy are marked by the manner in which nations function and not by lofty declarations. Effective leadership and an ingrained belief in innovation constitute a vital sine qua non to authentic self-governance. Essentially, therefore, and as Kingsley Moghalu maintains:

We can only arrive on the basis of economies that produce, manufacture and trade in goods with value added to them, not raw materials or crude minerals.... For instance, mobile phone banking that was developed mostly in Kenya is an innovation and various applications of the mobile phone are innovations. If people invent or innovate and those inventions and innovations are commercialised, that is how wealth is created. (July 2013)

I witnessed similar innovation as a child growing up in the short-lived nation of Biafra (eastern Nigeria), which tried to secede from the Nigerian Federation during a civil war that lasted from 1967 to 1970. From the beginning, Biafra had to contend with a much larger and much better equipped Nigerian nation and army, which would be subsequently supplied with more military support and weaponry from Britain, Russia and Egypt. Aside from facing an enemy that deliberately used starvation as a weapon of war; Biafran cities, towns and villages were dealt an incessant barrage of bombings and other military assaults, which forced the nation to constantly shift its seat of government. Notwithstanding the dire situation of things, Biafran scientists and authorities displayed a creative, determined and courageous spirit that remains unmatched in Africa and most of the world. They produced weapons, ammunition, armored vehicles, cooking matches, textiles, engine oil, dyes, foodstuff, shoe polish, medicines, soap and other personal hygienic needs with local materials that were often in short supply. Essentially, they looked to survival methods that were principally indigenous and inventive. But most amazingly, they successfully built oil refineries at Uzuakoli (in present Abia State) and at Amandugba (in present Imo State), which were estimated to refine up to 50,000 gallons of fuel per day (none of these locations are considered traditional oil producing areas). In addition, smaller portable refineries were scattered throughout Biafra, some of which were built by army divisions (2008 69). In modern peaceful times, Nigeria can hardly boast of a single refinery that operates efficiently. Sadly, too, post-war Nigeria has largely snubbed Biafran inventions and failed to exploit the talents that built them. But the Biafran story remains of utmost significance as it corroborates Gerhard's assertion that "no amount of money from the enormous, globally organized network of aid organizations will free them [Africans]. Only Africans themselves can accomplish that" (2010).

I am not citing war as the ideal situation to provide the motivation for self-reliance, but we can be motivated if we perceive our circumstances as synonymous with the type of urgency that the war created. While the war provided a legitimate situation that called for external aid, Biafrans had to largely fend for themselves as an economic blockade ensured that only meager aid entered the country. If the people could achieve what they achieved under tremendous pressure and danger, what excuse do African nations have in modern times of peace? If Japan, which is virtually without mineral resources, can rise to the position of a global economic power, what excuse do we have? In the end, Biafran leaders were dependent on the Biafran people and not foreign support, which is why they made it a priority to encourage internal resourcefulness and provide the best possible enabling environment for creativity under the circumstances. The opposite is the case when aid is “given with no strings attached,” as has been prevalent in Africa, “for this robs the recipient of competence” (Gerhard 2010).

The example of Biafra and survival in precolonial Africa lends credibility to the sarcasm in Gerhard’s statement, “On our side, the view has taken hold that we are primarily responsible for developing Africa” (2010). For Africa to move forward, Africans must reassume the primary task of being responsible for the region’s development, rather than subscribe to the implied notion that the solution to its problems resides in a humanitarian vision propounded by Americans and Europeans. Gerhard explains:

We have taken on too much responsibility for solving African problems. We have essentially educated them to, when problems arise, call for foreign aid first rather than trying to find solutions themselves. This attitude has become deeply rooted in Africa. This self-incapacitation is one of the most regrettable results of development cooperation thus far. Poorly designed development aid has made people dependent and accustomed them to a situation of perpetual assistance, preventing them from taking the initiative themselves. (2010)

The “self-incapacitation” that Gerhard mentions has serious mental implications that urge Africans to assume a status of incompetent, impoverished victim, and African leaders to sink deeper into indolence. The consequences are potentially and widely debilitating since, in Moghalu’s words, “Development begins first and foremost in the mind. A mind with a certain type of worldview can dominate and change realities around it. It is from this you can begin to decode why some societies are rising and why others have remained stagnant” (July 2013). A shamelessly dependent “mind” is not likely to rise or attain a state of dominance.

### Postscript – The “Return” to *Palm-Wine*

If there was one dilemma that was avoided in many traditional African societies, it was the embarrassment that came with begging and borrowing money (especially borrowing and not paying back). The ultimate goal was to avoid pecuniary dependency on anyone, which typically provoked instances of humiliation and debasement, even servitude. Though fictional, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* also serves as a storehouse for ancient Igbo values, practices and belief systems. One of the more unsettling grievances that Okonkwo, the tragic hero has with his late father, Unoka, is that Unoka owed too much money and failed to generate his own wealth (1959, 4-8). Aside from the potential to belittle, the lethal consequences of borrowing were so unnerving as they sometimes resulted in enslavement or the use of a family member, usually a child, for repayment. In my own extended family I witnessed this first-hand. As stated earlier, my grandfather was a renowned herbalist who traveled for and wide to cure a range of ailments. On two occasions his patients couldn't pay him and after negotiations presented him with their teenage daughters in marriage. They became his third and fourth wives and one of them still resides in our family compound in Ikot Ekpene, a small town in Nigeria's Akwa Ibom State. As harsh as the above transactions may sound, they highlight the dangers and stigmas that several African societies associated with begging, borrowing, owing, failing to pay or dependency. And yet, it is to the status of beggars that Africans have been relegated through current foreign aid practices:

These perpetual gifts have made partners into beggars, ones who no longer value the things they have been given and consequently have not maintained them well. Apart from a few exceptions, emergency aid being one example, free aid was and remains fundamentally wrong.... The result has placed Africa in an undignified position. (Gerhard 2010)

There is a crisis in Africa of looking outside of ourselves in our quest for solutions to our burdens and hardships. This is ironic for people who for centuries relied on themselves prior to encountering external influences. Of course isolation should be avoided at all costs, but intercultural contact and exchange is counterproductive when it is not informed by choice, reciprocal interaction, respect and equal partnership. Like everyone else, Africans ought to make meaningful contact with fellow Africans and non-Africans alike, but this should not evolve into an abandonment of one's primary responsibility to oneself, regardless of the knowledge and ideals that are tapped from external sources. It is such collaboration that World Bank economist, Wolfgang Fengler partly envisages when he predicts that in the near future “aid will be increasingly about transferring knowledge rather than money.” His thoughts

are predicated on his belief that, “No matter how significantly some donors may scale-up their financial commitments, aid money will remain minimal, compared to domestic resources in recipient countries” (2013). It is in the management, application and advancement of such “domestic resources” that Africa’s hope resides.

As African countries celebrate up to 50 years of independence, it is a shame that many of these countries subscribe to significant reliance on aid from foreign countries, some of which were the same ones from which they sought independence. Some African countries have had up to 70% of total government spending coming from foreign aid. We need to make up our minds; do we want to function like legitimate, respected, autonomous nations or are we going to continue to flaunt our “independence” like frivolous titles? We ultimately seem to exist under a warped type of colonial control where the colonizer is no less in charge in spite of not having widespread physical presence.

We make a show of looking to and celebrating our traditional wisdoms, but if we truly did we would stop acting like stranded stragglers on our land. Our focus on African traditions typically revolve around clothing, dances, arts, crafts, oral traditions, music, food, language and architecture. What seems to be lacking in this equation is the sincere, effective reclamation of the wisdom of our foremothers and forefathers and the subsequent utilization of this wisdom for regeneration and growth. We also need to be very concerned because as these elders and avatars of tradition die off, they are taking too many invaluable and perhaps irrecoverable secrets with them to their graves. The initial example of palm-wine being used as a cure for measles is pertinent here. Perhaps no one should anticipate a sustainable healing process whereby the physician or healer sprays palm-wine from their mouth onto the body of the patient. But clearly, palm-wine contains certain medicinal attributes that are yet to be fully explored and exploited. When my aunt used it to cure me of measles, she wasn’t carrying out an experiment; she was using a method that her people had used for many years. Further research could potentially reveal other medicinal qualities in the drink, while more refined methods and dosages could be formulated for administering the cure besides spraying it from the mouth. (After all, modern Western medicine has partly evolved from crude methods adopted by alchemists and physicians, not least being the use of leaches to suck infected blood from patients.)

Yeast has also been found in palm-wine, which is why it can be used to bake bread; I personally witnessed my mother and her friends do this when I was a boy. In addition to containing healing and nutritional ingredients, palm-wine is produced locally and is fairly inexpensive. So, instead of relying on complicated and expensive cures for measles from America and Europe; a feasible, less intricate, self-reliant, cheaper and more easily accessible cure is contained in palm-wine, one that could be extracted and eventually exported. Like palm-wine; our values, traditional practices,

natural environment, creative talents and customs are replete with expedient and exportable resources that have yet to be fully explored and refined, but which essentially carry answers to many of our healthcare, agricultural, governance, educational, ethical, judicial, scientific, infrastructural and social needs.

Today, Botswana's judicial system is greatly augmented by a heavy reliance on government-supported, traditional legal procedures that continue to witness laudable results. Interestingly, too, Botswana's economy shuns recovery through foreign aid and the difference can be seen in its economic growth as opposed to that of a sister southern African nation like Zimbabwe, despite their similarities in high HIV/AIDS rates, desertification and a colonial history. In addition, Botswana boasts one of the best credit risks on the continent, has a high adherence to rule of law, is ranked Africa's least corrupt country by Transparency International, is rated one of Africa's two most economically competitive nations by World Forum and offers one of the best investment opportunities in the developing world. It is the above factors, and not foreign aid, that define Botswana as one of Africa's most promising countries (Williams 2006). But with continued addiction to foreign aid, most African countries are yet to emulate Botswana's innovation and progress in self-reliance and self-preservation.

Historically, there is no indication that the West has had any special respect or unconditional love for the peoples of Africa. While generalizations should not be made on this subject, suspicion for the West's apparent obsession with providing aid to Africa is well-founded. The point is effectively articulated in Moghalu's remark:

...if you are looking at international organisations as the source of your development thinking and policy, there never was an economy that developed based on the work of international organisations. Show me also the country that was developed by foreign aid. But if you surrender your national interest to the interest of a whole without extracting value for yourself, it is not optimal policy. Many African countries do this. They go to international organisations and surrender their interest without appropriate interrogation. (2013).

Essentially, therefore, we must look inward and reconsider the wisdom and values that inform the curative power of "palm-wine" as well as other local systems, paradigms and materials that the African people have historically relied on for sustenance. While the goal is not to isolate ourselves, there should be a conscious effort to rely primarily on ourselves and to liaise with others on an equal partnership rather than within a structure that defines one party as judicious provider and the other as helpless receiver.

All conscientious Africans are tired of being portrayed as beggars, especially as it is evident that our continent is gifted with the wealth and capacity to deal with all of its problems. Begging fundamentally “devalues our pride and dignity” (2007)<sup>23</sup> as Ayittey insists, and in the eyes of the international community (including those who claim to support us with aid) we are little more than disorderly scroungers that cannot be taken too seriously. Under the guidance of effective leadership, solutions to Africa’s sociopolitical and economic problems are its prime responsibility and not Europe’s or America’s. The question of steadfast, dynamic leadership must therefore be readdressed by all diligent Africans as well as non-Africans with sincere concerns for the continent, while ongoing crusades to reject high-handed leaders will need to gain momentum at home and abroad.

But as long as we continue to relinquish the responsibilities of our rulers and governments to foreigners and former colonial overlords, these self-styled “benefactors” will continue to situate themselves as legitimate regulators of our well-being and future. The result is the delineation of Africans within a continuous, condescending cycle of subordination and vulnerability.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Biafra (former Eastern Nigeria) attempted to secede from the larger Nigerian Federation in a brutal two and half year war that lasted from July 1967 to January 1970.

<sup>2</sup>In addition to the two vibrant African intellectuals mentioned in this essay, Zambian and Ghanaian economists Dambisa Moyo and George Ayittey, renowned Ugandan Journalist Andrew Mwenda and Nigerian Economist Kingsley Moghalu are also strongly against aspects of foreign aid to Africa.

<sup>3</sup>"Be it resolved foreign aid does more harm than good," *Foreign Aid*, Munk Debates. YouTube also itemizes comments by each speaker at the Munk Debates. For direct access to Dambisa Moyo's comments, see "Munk Debates: Dambisa Moyo argues in favor of the motion (5 of 15)" (1 Jun.2009), *YouTube*.

<sup>4</sup>"Aid to Africa is doing more harm than good," Intelligence Squared U.S. debate, 4 Dec. 2007, *Vimeo*, 2010.

<sup>5</sup>"Aid to Africa is doing more harm than good," Intelligence Squared U.S. debate, *Vimeo*. For direct access to C. Payne Lucas' *YouTube* comments, see "Aid to Africa Debate: C. Payne Lucas (7 of 14) – Intelligence Squared" (4 Dec. 2007)., *YouTube*, n.d., Web, 4 Sept. 2011 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UOhgABTMau8>> and "Aid to Africa Debate: Q & A, part 2 (9 of 14) – Intelligence Squared" (4 Dec. 2007), *YouTube*, n.d., Web, 4 Sep. 2011 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSmLpUWKB0U>>.

<sup>6</sup>Mobutu renamed the Democratic Republic of Congo the Republic of Zaire in October 1971. In 1997, Tutsi rebels and other anti-Mobutu groups carried out a successful overthrow of the dictator and again renamed the country the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

<sup>7</sup>"Aid to Africa is doing more harm than good," Intelligence Squared U.S. debate, *Vimeo*. Also see "Aid to Africa Debate: C. Payne Lucas (7 of 14) – Intelligence Squared," *YouTube* and "Aid to Africa Debate: Q & A, part 2 (9 of 14) – Intelligence Squared," *YouTube*.

<sup>8</sup>"Aid to Africa is doing more harm than good," Intelligence Squared U.S. debate, *Vimeo*. Also see "Aid to Africa Debate: C. Payne Lucas (7 of 14) – Intelligence Squared," *YouTube* and "Aid to Africa Debate: Q & A, part 2 (9 of 14) – Intelligence Squared," *YouTube*.

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<sup>9</sup>“Aid to Africa is doing more harm than good,” Intelligence Squared U.S. debate, *Vimeo*. Also see “Aid to Africa Debate: C. Payne Lucas (7 of 14) – Intelligence Squared,” *YouTube* and “Aid to Africa Debate: Q & A, part 2 (9 of 14) – Intelligence Squared,” *YouTube*.

<sup>10</sup>“Aid to Africa is doing more harm than good,” Intelligence Squared U.S. debate, *Vimeo*. Also see “Aid to Africa Debate: George Ayittey (6 of 14) – Intelligence Squared,” *YouTube*, n.d., Web, 4 Sep. 2011 <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gNveG3w5yeU>>.

<sup>11</sup>“Be it resolved foreign aid does more harm than good,” Foreign Aid, Munk Debates. Also see “Munk Debates: Dambisa Moyo argues in favor of the motion (5 of 15),” *YouTube*.

<sup>12</sup>The *Wall Street Journal*, 21 Mar. 2009, Web, accessed 22 Feb. 2013 <<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB123758895999200083>>.

<sup>13</sup>“Aid to Africa is doing more harm than good,” Intelligence Squared U.S. debate. Also see “Aid to Africa Debate: George Ayittey (6 of 14) – Intelligence Squared,” *YouTube*.

<sup>14</sup>“Aid to Africa is doing more harm than good,” Intelligence Squared U.S. debate. Also see “Aid to Africa Debate: George Ayittey (6 of 14) – Intelligence Squared,” *YouTube*.

<sup>15</sup>“Aid to Africa is doing more harm than good,” Intelligence Squared U.S. debate. Also see “Aid to Africa Debate: George Ayittey (6 of 14) – Intelligence Squared,” *YouTube*.

<sup>16</sup>“Be it resolved foreign aid does more harm than good,” Foreign Aid, Munk Debates. Also see “Munk Debates: Dambisa Moyo argues in favor of the motion (5 of 15),” *YouTube*.

<sup>17</sup>“Aid to Africa is doing more harm than good,” Intelligence Squared U.S. debate. For direct access to Ayittey’s comments, go to, “Aid to Africa Debate: George Ayittey (6 of 14) – Intelligence Squared,” *YouTube*, n.d., Web, 4 Sep. 2011.

<sup>18</sup>“US firm banned for corruption,” *The Nation*, 10 Dec. 2010, Web, accessed 26 Feb. 2013 <<http://www.nation.com.pk/pakistan-news-newspaper-daily-english-online/politics/10-Dec-2010/US-firm-banned-for-corruption>>.

<sup>19</sup>“Aid to Africa is doing more harm than good,” Intelligence Squared U.S. debate. Also see “Aid to Africa Debate: George Ayittey (6 of 14) – Intelligence Squared,” *YouTube*; “Be it resolved foreign aid does more harm than good,” *Foreign Aid*, Munk Debates. Also see “Munk Debates: Dambisa Moyo argues in favor of the motion (5 of 15),” *YouTube*.

<sup>20</sup>“Aid to Africa is doing more harm than good,” Intelligence Squared U.S. debate. Also see “Aid to Africa Debate: George Ayittey (6 of 14) – Intelligence Squared,” *YouTube*.

<sup>21</sup>“Be it resolved foreign aid does more harm than good,” *Foreign Aid*, Munk Debates. Also see “Munk Debates: Dambisa Moyo argues in favor of the motion (5 of 15),” *YouTube*.

<sup>22</sup>“Aid to Africa is doing more harm than good,” Intelligence Squared U.S. debate. Also see “Aid to Africa Debate: George Ayittey (6 of 14) – Intelligence Squared,” *YouTube*.

<sup>23</sup>“Aid to Africa is doing more harm than good,” Intelligence Squared U.S. debate. Also see “Aid to Africa Debate: George Ayittey (6 of 14) – Intelligence Squared,” *YouTube*.