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MAY
2009
11

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5

[Dambisa Moyo's Curious Complaint Against Bono's "Glamour Aid"](#)

Not long after hearing about Dambisa Moyo's new book, *Dead Aid*, in one of our own [@U2 OTRs](#), a few voices came into my world asking if I had read her book or could believe what she said about Bono's efforts.

I hadn't read her book. What I did was read some interviews with her and track some of her appearances on her book tour, which are advertised on her [website](#). Don't know if I will read her book now that I've learned more about her core arguments, which are: aid, especially charitable aid, doesn't help Africa as much as some Westerners might think; many African governments are corrupt; trade with Africa and a home-grown economy are what Africa needs for a better, sustainable, future; celebrities don't help Africans by portraying the continent as second-rate, desperate and hungry. (*She wrote a book on these points?*)

The more I read, the more I thought of all Bono has said since joining the Jubilee 2000 campaign in 1999. Bono was making the case for acts of justice in Western relations toward Africa ten years ago and has followed it with calls for debt relief, calls for increased humanitarian aid to help combat AIDS and basic, easily treatable illnesses, and calls for increased trade.

Moyo seems curiously and conspicuously careful to not make Bono an exact target of her criticism. She walks right up to the question but answers with complaints about "celebrities" in general. But that didn't stop the New York Times from referring to her as "[The Anti-Bono.](#)" (Read just the first two questions from the Times to get a sense of her delicate handling of the Bono matter.)

To me, the most informative interview was with [Guernica](#). It's a long one, but it helped me greatly in getting a sense of how Moyo wanted to shape her argument and avoid admitting the fact that Bono has never advocated the aid models she's attacking.

To be fair, she wants to talk about ending systematic aid to Africa:

Let's be clear on one thing. My fundamental belief is that social services and public goods—roads, infrastructure, schools, and so on—are the responsibility of government. It is not the responsibility, nor the expectation, of Africans that those services should be provided by foreigners or outsiders. I do criticize any system where social services are provided by a system that is outside the continent. Because that means a system where the government is not accountable to its people. Do I think that these types of interventions help or do some good? Yes. But just to be clear, we need to know what they can and cannot do. I do not think that these types of interventions can deliver long-term sustainable growth or alleviate poverty. The example I give in my book is that with aid, you may be able to provide a scholarship for a girl to go to school, but how much use is that if at the end of the day, the economy hasn't grown and there are no jobs for her?

Also, in fairness, she says her book talks very little about celebrities, but she tells [Guernica](#) she does want to say three things about celebrities and "Glamour Aid":

First, I don't think they're right. I may have been more sympathetic if

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they were pushing an agenda for more trade or more foreign direct investment, but the fact that they're pushing for an additional fifty billion dollars [in aid] illustrates to me that they don't understand economics and perhaps do not add value to the debate.

The second point is that in the aid model, you disenfranchise Africans because the governments are not held accountable. The fact that there was a vacuum big enough for these celebrities to step in and speak, ostensibly, on behalf of the African continent is worrying. Africans stand in the hot African sun to elect their leaders, not celebrities. We expect African leaders to come up with policies about where they want to take Africa. We expect these leaders to attend G8 and other international gatherings to articulate a view of where they see Africa. The African people do not expect their countries to be represented by celebrities.

The third point is that these celebrities don't portray Africa in a positive light. This continent suffers from a very severe PR problem. The world is asking us as to raise our children in an environment where we're constantly told that we can't do anything—we're poor, we're dirty, we're impoverished, we're hungry, we're corrupt, we're war-torn, disease-ridden.

Maybe Moyo knows that these three complaints really don't apply to Bono's words or actions. And if she does, what then would she say of Bono's efforts? And if she does, why isn't she saying more to encourage her teammate?

Have you read *Dead Aid* or come across more insights into Moyo's arguments? Let us know.

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5 Responses to "Dambisa Moyo's Curious Complaint Against Bono's "Glamour Aid""



Beth 11 May 2009 at 4:12 pm [permalink](#)

ONE did an analysis of the book's use of statistics and some major errors of fact in Moyo's text. <http://www.one.org/c/us/policybrief/911/>

I was also interested by this Washington Post article by former Bush staffer Michael Gerson: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/04/02/AR2009040203285.html>

Apart from questions of the quality of the book's assertions, one cultural aspect of this discussion I've found interesting is how some voices in search of ammunition for opposition to aid are tending to claim that Moyo speaks for "Africans." Well, sure: for Africans who happen to agree with her. Do people not have enough respect for the continent to realize that naturally there will be a diversity of intellectual, political, and economic perspectives among its writers? No one would dare claim one controversial book by one "European" spoke for "Europe." Yet somehow it's still possible to get away with a condescending generalization when it's about "Africans."



David Comay 11 May 2009 at 9:13 pm [permalink](#)

Is it interesting to how she has been set up against Bono in the press. One of the things the latter has advocated is more trade with Africa and lowering of trade

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@bethandbono No clue, sorry to say. But @wxander sounds like she knows the scoop.
2 days ago

Lady Gaga "wants to break U2's record for the highest grossing and most attended tour with a 450-date jaunt." <http://t.co/ZDwCffb6>
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Posted: Column: off the record..., vol. 11, no. 1, pp. 11-12, 2009



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barriers elsewhere in the world which disadvantages African countries from exporting their goods. It seems she and Bono are much more aligned than the press makes them out to be.

Of course, Bono has advocated aid in the cases of debt relief and sending antiretroviral drugs but I can't believe even Moyo would advocate that Africa spend their resources to service their old debt or pay high prices to get those medicines.

I'm sure there are serious differences on some matters but I also wonder if the media is looking for an argument here too as it makes for a more sensational story.



Dave Lucas 12 May 2009 at 4:38 am [permalink](#)

Hello! I thought you might like to know that I've interviewed Dambisa and one of her critics: a young African student attending college in Canada. You can hear it HERE:

<http://dave-lucas.blogspot.com/2009/04/interview-dambisa-moyo.html>



Jon 13 May 2009 at 7:37 am [permalink](#)

it's an interesting discussion. thanks for posting about it. sadly i don't know nearly enough to have an opinion!



Lungo Katimati 31 May 2009 at 10:13 am [permalink](#)

Dambisa is right on a number of things. First, aid from developed countries into the hands of most African leaders does nothing but increasing not only poverty but bad governance. Much of the money sent to Africa is used to entrench politicians who use it during election campaigns. It no wonder that very few ruling parties or sitting president lose elections.

The other question is why developed countries continue giving aid to government led by identified corrupt leaders. Why does the West give money to the Swazi government? What do our leaders do with our tax money, even the little they collect if every water tank I see at home has the Japanese flag on it and every TB pill I take is paid for by the Dutch government?

Lastly, I believe Dambisa has been misunderstood. She is not against charity to communities or humanitarian aid. Like many of us, she is against charity aimed at the governments of Africa.

Lungo – Namibian

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